



EPOCH OF TWILIGHT

BOOK 01

Don't Play People For A Fool

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Epoch of Twilight

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by

Don't Play People For A Fool

Synopsis

Have you ever thought that the state of the world as it presently is, could revert to the laws of the ancients? When a series of strange incidents beginning with the disappearance of his friend led Luo Yuan to question the possibility of an apocalypse, he becomes embroiled in the midst of a global-scale chaos.

Evolution has turned the flora and fauna of the vast and bountiful Earth into something that had never been seen before. Coincidentally, the all-dominating Homo sapiens have ended up at the bottom of the food chain. From mystery to crisis, will Luo Yuan discover a means of saving humanity by racing to the top of the food chain? Or will he strive in accordance with the law of the jungle? It is the dawn of an age of the survival of the fittest.

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Chapter 1: Mission

“Tscht!”

As the door of the bus opened, Luo Yuan disembarked, following the flow of the crowd. His white shirt had long been drenched in sweat while dirt and stains formed abstract art on the fabric. Commuting daily was a nightmare for Luo Yuan, and this unavoidable routine was testing his limits on a regular basis.

“It’s getting hotter these days,” Luo Yuan thought while he pulled at his damp shirt. The hot weather combined with today’s difficult client had made him even more agitated. Luo Yuan tucked his briefcase under his arm and walked briskly towards the Jingyue Residential Area.

The Jingyue Residential Area was near Donghu City’s suburbs, more than 10 kilometers from the city center. However, rent prices in the area were far from cheap. Luo Yuan shared a house with a young couple. It was a fully furnished 2-bedroom house, and he only had to pay CNY1200 out of the CNY3000 monthly rental, which was considered a very good deal for a first tier city. Although the location was not very convenient, his housemates were decent and they were quite nice to him.

He breathed in the smell of freshly cut grass before seeing a few workers mowing the lawn in the residential area. “What’s going on? Didn’t they mow the grass just two weeks ago?” Luo Yuan felt puzzled before he looked over at the lawns that had yet to be mowed. Only then did he realize that the grass had grown extremely fast, and was reaching about half a foot already. The

trees in the area also seemed to have grown taller and looked very bushy and dense.

He then began to notice how odd the weather was. It was still hot when they were already approaching December. Most of the maple trees in the area were usually bald by this time of the year, but this year they strangely seemed to have grown lusher. There were many theories about it on the news, from equatorial counter currents to sunspot activity, some had even said that it could have been a supernova explosion from a nearby planetary system. A simple search online could produce all sorts of arguments and hypotheses complete with photos and solid proof. All were equally logical yet headache-inducing and, at the end of the day, taken as gospel.

“Better leave it to the scientists. What is there for an ordinary citizen to think about?” Luo Yuan shook his head.

A few minutes later, the aroma of a home-cooked meal greeted him as he opened the security screen door. Just as he changed into his house slippers, Zhao Yali came out of the kitchen. She looked surprised that it was not her boyfriend. Recovering with a smile, she said, “Oh, Yuan, it’s you. Let’s have dinner together. I’ve cooked an extra portion today!” She went back into the kitchen, obviously still busy preparing.

Zhao Yali was actually quite young. She was 27 years old, just four years older than Luo Yuan. She had fair skin, a slim figure, and a charming smile on her delicate almond-shaped face. She looked like a typical Jiangnan canal town lady.

“Sure, I get to save money that way,” Luo Yuan accepted her invitation with a big smile. “What about Bro Qiang? How come he’s not back yet? He usually gets off from work quite early. I was thinking I’d play a game with him while I waited for dinner,” Luo Yuan added as he saw that there was still a pair of slippers laid out.

Zhao Yali’s boyfriend, Chen Weiqiang, worked at the Forestry Bureau and his workload was usually quite light. He started work at 9:00 am and would usually get off at 4:30 pm. He hardly ever joined any social gatherings. It was quite strange for Luo Yuan to not find him home at this hour.

“All you do is play games!” Zhao Yali accused haughtily, still in her apron, “I know both of you gamed until 1:00 am while I was sleeping last night. Why didn’t you stop him?”

Luo Yuan smiled and replied, “Alright, I’ll try to stop him next time. I can’t promise I’ll succeed though! He’s an addict.”

“He can’t force you if you don’t want to play!” Zhao Yali retorted.

Zhao Yali actually knew her boyfriend well enough to realize that she could not put the entire blame on Luo Yuan. To put it nicely, Chen Weiqiang was a family man. But he was also known as a geek. He had no social life. He always left for home right after his working hours and spent the rest of his day gaming until midnight. She tried to stop him but failed most of the time.

“Okay, we’ll go to bed before 11:00 pm next time.”

Luo Yuan felt that they had been staying up really late recently as well, and always felt sleepy during lunch time.

He went to his room to get some clean clothes and then headed to the bathroom for a shower. Afterwards, he started a game of Dota. He realized that the sky had already gotten dark after just one game. Zhao Yali came into his room just as he was about to start another one.

“Yuan, let’s have dinner. We don’t have to wait for him anymore,” she said softly with a worried expression on her face.

“Have you given him a call?” Luo Yuan asked.

“I have, he didn’t pick up!” Zhao Yali tousled her hair a bit before saying, “He did say that he’ll be inspecting the forestry situation in Gaotang Town with his superior this morning. Perhaps he’s still busy. Never mind. Let’s eat first.”

Luo Yuan stopped asking and the two of them sat down at the dining table. Zhao Yali was a very good cook. There were five dishes and a bowl of soup on the table, all of them looking and smelling delicious.

“Oh, this Old Duck Soup is my favorite! I’ve liked it since I was in college and I’ve been missing it. Let me try this first!” Luo Yuan helped himself to a piece of duck fillet.

“How is it? Did I add too much salt?” Zhao Yali asked nervously.

“Are you kidding? You could’ve been a head chef with your culinary skills! It’s such a waste that you’re only cooking for Bro Qiang,” Luo Yuan complimented her.

Zhao Yali laughed and chided, “Stop flattering me! They’re just regular dishes. Have some more if they’re so delicious.”

The heavy earlier atmosphere was replaced by a harmonious one as they joked throughout dinner.

It was when the dinner came to an end that Zhao Yali started to worry again.

She took out her phone and redialed her boyfriend’s number, her expression turning darker.

“What’s the matter?” Luo Yuan asked.

“His phone has been switched off,” Zhao Yali replied quietly.

“Maybe it ran out of battery. Besides, Bro Qiang will probably need to entertain his colleagues after the inspection. With his alcohol tolerance, I bet he’s already passed out,” Luo Yuan comforted her while smiling.

“That’s true. His alcohol tolerance is the worst. All it takes is a bottle of beer to knock him out!” Zhao Yali looked slightly relieved

when she entertained that possibility.

Luo Yuan heard a beeping machine sound coming from within him. His facial expression changed slightly as he summoned up the system silently. A green-framed hologram screen hovered in mid-air at the same time.

Character: Luo Yuan

Occupation: Foreign Trade Sales Representative, Qimei Trading Co. Ltd.

Level: 3

Experience: 900/1200

Attributes –

Energy: 10 (10)

Dexterity: 11 (10)

Physique: 11 (10)

Intelligence: 13 (10)

Sensitivity: 10 (10)

Determination: 11 (10)

Skills: Science 16, Math 14, Mandarin 19, English 16, Finance 17, Programming 9, Dancing 1, Painting 3, Gaming 6, Negotiating 9, Socializing 7, Cooking 3, Driving 1, Hand-to-hand Combat 4

Special Skills: Identification

Pending Attribute Points: 0

Pending Skill Points: 4

Pending Mission: Level F – Become Assistant Regional Manager of the Foreign Trade Department at Qimei Foreign Trading Co. Ltd. in 12 months (Cancelled)

Optional Mission: Level F+ – Investigate the reason of Chen Weiqiang’s disappearance in 5 days (Accept/Decline)

He was stunned. Chen Weiqiang had gone missing? How?

Luo Yuan had had some good times with him. These bad news felt unbearable coming at this time. He felt worse when he looked at Zhao Yali who was grinning beside him.

“I must save him!” Luo Yuan thought.

He looked at the mission on the attribute screen. This was the first time that he had received a short term Level F+ mission. Short term missions like rescuing a drowning child and participating in a sprint race during sports day, which were the ones he usually completed, were all Level F. They had been quite easy to achieve while only missions like getting a scholarship and sitting for a Level 6 English test, which required a high level of effort, would be categorized as Level F+.

The tag Level F+ itself betrayed the mission’s difficulty and danger!

However, what was even stranger was that his mission of becoming the Assistant Regional Manager of Foreign Trade at Qimei Foreign Trading Co. Ltd. had been cancelled!

What had happened to the company? Would it be shutting down? Qimei Trading had about 10 billion dollars of trade value a year and its sales were always good. Could it really be shutting down so soon?

Luo Yuan recalled that this system had come about when he had been in his second year of university. His parents had been killed in a car accident and his girlfriend of one year had dumped him during the same time. He had been depressed and he used to spend his nights in internet cafes. One early morning, when he was staggering his way back home, a random object had fallen from the

sky and hit him right on the head, injuring him severely.

He had always been a third tier student in a third tier university who truanted like nobody's business. However, once he had been discharged from the hospital, he had suddenly changed and put all his effort into his studies, surprising everyone who had come to know him. He had already gotten a partial scholarship for the second term of that academic year, had sat a Level 4 and 6 English, a sales qualification certificate, an international trade vouching certificate, and had even advanced his degree. His impressive résumé upon graduation was the result of his perseverance through every hardship and obstacle. His initial path of fate had been shattered into pieces by the system.

Unfortunately, each level up was relatively more difficult as the missions were given to him, not found. Plus, each level up only rewarded him one AP, otherwise he would have already become a superhero. After all, the reward policy of the system was different from other games as each AP added increased 50% of the respective attribute. Out of the three AP that he had obtained, two had been added to Intelligence and one had been added to Dexterity. If he had trained a bit more, his sprinting speed could have beaten the speed of a world champion by now.

“What are you thinking about? Am I boring you?” Zhao Yali knocked on the dining table, the dissatisfaction clear in her tone.

Only then did Luo Yuan realize that he had zoned out for a while. He rushed to explain, “Never. I just had a very annoying customer today who drained all my energy.”

“Perhaps you should get yourself a girlfriend. Don’t think about work all the time. Is there anyone that you like? Do you need my help?” Zhao Yali voiced her concern.

“I’m good, no worries,” Luo Tuan replied as he thought about the mission.

They continued to chit chat for a little longer. Zhao Yali got up from her chair to clean the table.

“Let me get this. I can’t have you cook dinner and clean too!”

“You’ll break the bowls. Just go back to your games,” Zhao Yali laughed as she cleaned up fast.

Luo Yuan thanked her and went back to his room. As he lay on the bed, he thought about the mission.

“Tomorrow is Friday, so if I take one day off from work, I’ll have three days to complete this mission.”

He felt less enthusiastic about his job ever since he had figured out the possibility of Qimei Trading shutting down in six months’ time.

The next day, Luo Yuan came back from his usual morning exercise at the same time that Zhao Yali was coming out of the bathroom. She looked preoccupied. She forced a smile and greeted him. Luo Yuan knew that she must still be worried about her

boyfriend not coming home the previous night, but he didn't know how to comfort her. He looked at the time and left the house after applying for leave to his regional marketing manager.

The Ministry of Forestry was just a few kilometers from the Jingyue residential area. Luo Yuan had opted to jog there instead of taking the public transport. Since he had gotten the system, his interest in working out had been boosted as he could now measure his body's attributes. Although he had not achieved much all these years besides an AP in both Energy and Determination, he had made a habit of exercising every morning.

About ten minutes later, Luo Yuan had arrived at the Ministry of Forestry. He registered at the guard post and stated the purpose of his visit. Walking into the office, he saw employees scattered around the main entrance as he approached a young worker.

“Chen Weiqiang? I think I've heard of him but he is not in our department. I'm not sure, perhaps you can check with other staff.” The young man carried an air of arrogance, his eyes scanning Luo Yuan as he spoke.

Luo Yuan thanked him with a smile and went on to ask somebody else. However, nobody seemed to know who or where Chen Weiqiang was. A middle-aged man passing by suddenly stopped and asked, “You're looking for Chen Weiqiang? Is it urgent?”

He was holding a briefcase and rocking a beer belly. He had a slight frown though, and looked serious overall. Luo Yuan looked at him and knew that he had to be a superior. He smiled and asked, “Are you my brother-in-law's supervisor? My sister sent me here

to check if he is alright. He didn't come home last night and his phone has been switched off.”

Luo Yuan knew that the manager would not disclose any information if he told him that Chen Weiqiang was his roommate.

“Oh! He went to the forestry station in Gaotang Town with Supervisor He. They should be back by today. You can go home.”

Beer Belly did not seem to suspect a thing and strode away right after finishing his sentence.

“If a Level F+ mission is this easy, then no reason to trouble myself!” Luo Yuan thought and sighed.

It seemed that he could not get any further information, so he walked out of the building. Then he hailed a cab to head to the forestry station in Gaotang Town right away.

The driver was a talkative person. He started talking non-stop the moment that Luo Yuan got into the car. At first, Luo Yuan had replied nonchalantly but eventually he gave up responding. The car quieted down when the driver finally stopped talking after noticing that Luo Yuan was not keen on continuing the conversation. The traffic in Donghu City was terrible, especially during morning rush hours. It only became smooth again when they passed the outskirts.

The trees along both sides of the road were tall and lush, looking

exceptionally invigorating as they formed two rows of umbrellas that shaded the roadway. It would have been an enjoyable drive along the road, had it not been for the animal corpses that littered it every few kilometers. Corpses of snakes, rats, and sometimes even weasels and dogs, were the most common kind.

“Are there many snakes around here? They seem to be everywhere!” Luo Yuan said, frowning.

He had been afraid of snakes ever since he was young. He had goosebumps even if he saw one from a very long distance.

“It’s a recent development. What you saw is nothing compared to the village. The villagers could earn CNY500 to CNY600 a day just by hunting for snakes and frogs. Just a few days ago, someone caught a wild boar about 300 kilos! Nobody knows where it came from! The hill is becoming a jungle fast!” The driver had obviously held his tongue for a long time, so now he seized the opportunity to start talking non-stop again.

The topography around Donghu City was a flatland. Most of its mountain peaks were less than 300 meters above sea level. Therefore, it was more appropriate to classify them as hills instead of mountains. Plus, due to recent exploitation, rabbits and pheasants were hard to spot, and so was a larger-sized animal, much like a wild boar. Luo Yuan had been living in the city, hence he had not noticed any of these things. As he listened to what the driver had to say, he learned about the major changes that had been happening there during the past few months. “If that’s true, then isn’t the village dangerous?”

“What’s so dangerous about it? We can make exotic dishes out of them! It’s more dangerous uphill. There have already been a few people missing. Couldn’t even find their bodies. Ever since, people hardly go up there anymore. I’ve heard that the local government intends to chop down all the trees on the hill though.” The driver went on, “They used to rally to plant more of them, and now they’re cutting them down.”

“People missing!” Luo Yuan immediately thought of the F+ mission. “Maybe Chen Weiqiang has also gone missing after going up that hill.”

Luo Yuan lost his interest in keeping up with the conversation beyond that point. He knew the mission he had been given had to be a challenging one. It was Level F+ after all. How could it be completed so easily? He was worried about his safety if he really had to go up that hill, though. He was unprepared and had no weapons whatsoever.

However, it was useless for him to overthink it; the best course would be to go to the forestry station first to inquire, and then think about his next step. About 10 minutes later, the cab had pulled up in front of a two-story building.

“Alright, this is the forestry station. It’s CNY78 in total. Do you want me to wait for you?” the driver asked.

“No, thanks!” Luo Yuan paid and got off the car, making his way to the entrance.

Chapter 2: Gaotang Town

A part of Donghu City, Gaotang Town was a small independent city with convenient transportation and a well-developed economy. However, its forestry resources were poor. With its limited given revenue and additional income, the forestry station seemed much more desolated compared to the lofty police station about ten meters away. Luo Yuan walked into the lobby of the building. There were only a few workers at the reception counter and all of them were either playing card games or chatting it up. He went straight up to the second floor.

The Chief Officer was not in, so Luo Yuan could only knock on the door of the Deputy Chief Officer.

“Come in!”

He opened the door and entered the office. A plump middle-aged man was inside. He had big bags under his eyes, which looked a little swollen. He took a quick glance at Luo Yuan and asked, “What’s the matter?” before he resumed reading the document on his desk.

Luo Yuan did not like being ignored, but he forced a smile and said, “Hi, I’m Chen Weiqiang’s brother-in-law. He came to Gaotang Town for an inspection with the city council Supervisor He yesterday and hasn’t returned yet. My sister has sent me here to check on him. Do you know where they went?”

The middle-aged man finally raised his head, the shock evident

on his face. “Supervisor He and Chen did not come back. Hold on, let me make a call.”

He stood up, took out his phone and made call after call, the beads of sweat on his forehead teeming more and more by the minute. A few minutes later, he finally slumped back against his chair.

“Where did they go yesterday?” Luo Yuan asked curiously.

“Yesterday Supervisor He, Mayor Xia, Chief Officer Wang and Chen went up the hill for inspection after lunch. They should have been back by yesterday already. Have you called Chen? Is it possible that he’s gone somewhere else?” he asked nervously.

Luo Yuan was startled. This felt like a bad omen in his heart. He quickly replied, “My sister has called him several times and I visited the Ministry of Forestry this morning as well. His manager told me that my brother-in-law and his supervisor have not returned yet, and that it’s possible that they’re still on the hill. The most important thing to do now is to get help from the police!”

“Yes! Yes!” the man nodded his head. If anything happened to these superiors, not only would the local government be criticized, but he himself would also be fired from his position as Deputy Chief Officer. He quickly stood up and made a call.

“Hello!”

“Chief Inspector Xie? I’m Cao Minghua from the forestry station... Yes, yes... I’ll be heading over in a while... It’s difficult to explain over the phone... I’m coming over right now!” He hung up the phone and said, “Come on, follow me to the police station!”

Luo Yuan and Deputy Chief Officer Cao quickly left and went to the nearby police station.

Ten minutes later, Deputy Chief Officer Cao walked into the Chief Inspector’s office along with Luo Yuan and explained everything one more time. Chief Inspector Xie was alarmed and he stood up, accusing him, “How could it take you so long to realize? It's almost 24 hours!”

Seeing Cao Minghua’s grim expression, he gave a wave of the hand, “Let me call PA Zhao!”

He then took out his phone and walked out of his office. He looked very serious when he returned.

“Both of you go back and wait. I’ll get my people to go up the hill. I’ll make sure they find them.”

“Alright! We trust you, Chief Inspector Xie!” Cao Minghua nodded solemnly and got ready to leave.

Luo Yuan realized that it was none of his business but he had to go work on the case himself or else the mission could not be completed. He quickly said, “Chief Inspector Xie, I want to go too!”

“It's very dangerous on the hill and we don't have the manpower to protect you. Wait here patiently, okay?” Chief Inspector Xie rejected his proposal with a frown.

“I know that it's dangerous, but that's my brother-in-law. How can I just stay here and wait? I've had some combat training before. I promise I won't be a burden to you,” Luo Yuan said, trying to appear anxious.

Chief Inspector Xie took a look at Luo Yuan. The man was tall and muscular. Obviously he had been working out and could possibly be of help up on the hill.

“Okay. But you need to follow the orders!”

“I promise I'll follow them!” Luo Yuan answered immediately.

Chief Inspector Xie dialed on his phone again before speaking, “Captain Chen, have three members on call right now and report to my office!”

Barely a moment after he had hung up, a lean tanned middle-aged man came into the office, “Chief Inspector, you asked for me?”

“Yes, put your work on hold for now, there's a more pressing matter. A few superiors from the city and Mayor Xia have gone missing on the hill. I want your team to find them now!”

The man's facial expression turned serious at once, "I'll go right away. Is there anything else, Chief Inspector?"

"Yes, this is Luo Yuan, one of the victims' family members. He wants to come, take him along!"

He took a peek at Luo Yuan and replied, "Alright, I'm leaving right now!"

He then spoke to Luo Yuan coldly, "Follow me!"

The two of them left the office. There were already three people waiting in the corridor, two men and a woman, all whom looked younger than thirty.

Of course Luo Yuan's eyes would set on the young woman. She wore a short-sleeved police uniform shirt, her waist was slim and her breasts pert, and her long legs were clad in a pair of nude stockings below the hem of her police uniform skirt. She was like a ripe peach, absolutely alluring.

"Guess this is what people call a uniform fetish," Luo Yuan thought as he shifted his gaze to the two men. One of them was around thirty years old, tall, with a face full of pimples and a crew cut. If not for his police uniform, he could certainly pass for a mugger. The other man looked like the epitome of innocence. He seemed to be new to work.

“Captain Chen, what do we have today? How come it’s so urgent?” Crew Cut asked Captain Chen, his tone not very respectful.

“We’ll talk about it later. Everyone change into a long-sleeved uniform and get your weapons ready. We are going up the hill. Wang Fei, get a uniform for Luo Yuan too, he’s coming with us,” he ordered the rookie while he looked at Crew Cut.

“Yes, Captain!” Wang Fei replied immediately before turning to Luo Yuan, “Follow me. You must be the same size as me, right? You won’t mind wearing my uniform, will you?”

“Of course not. Thank you!” Luo Yuan smiled and asked, “Sergeant Wang, you just passed the civil servant test this year, didn’t you?”

Wang Fei laughed and said, “*ss, I didn’t pass, I graduated from the police academy. I came here to be a defense team member using some connections. But I can transfer if I perform well. Anyway, let’s get to work now!”

“That doesn’t sound bad. At least the benefits should be good!”

“They’re decent enough to survive!” was the man’s reply, but his tone was mixed with a hint of determination. He took two sets of uniforms and two pairs of boots out of his locker and handed one of them to Luo Yuan. The weather had been warm and humid lately, and it was evident that the long-sleeved uniform had been ruled out for a short period of time as it smelled moldy, but overall

it was still clean.

When Luo Yuan was done changing, Crew Cut came in and tapped Luo Yuan's head, "Could pass as a policeman. Where are you from, kid? How come you're following us up the hill?"

Luo Yuan was a bit unhappy and moved his head out of the way discreetly while smiling, "My brother-in-law has gone missing on the hill. I'm coming along to search for him. My name is Luo Yuan. What should I call you?"

"Just call me Zhao Qiang."

Zhao Qiang knew that he had annoyed the young man and grinned, "Don't mind me, it's an old habit. So, who is your brother-in-law?"

"He works for the Ministry of Forestry," Luo Yuan answered vaguely and ignored Zhao Qiang in favor of asking Wang Fei, "Can you give me a gun for self-defense? I heard it's quite dangerous in the forest."

Wang Fei shook his head, "I can't simply give you a gun. It's against the rules, no way!"

Luo Yuan quickly asked, "How about a knife or something? You can't have me going into the forest completely unarmed, right?" This was an F+ mission. It would definitely be very dangerous for him to go in without a weapon.

“Okay, let me ask Captain Chen.”

Wang Fei walked out of the locker room.

A moment later, he came back and said, "No gun, but you can have a knife. We've seized a lot of them, anyway. I'll take you to the storeroom."

The two of them went to the storeroom, which was located at the end of the corridor. Wang Fei opened one of the big boxes. There were all sorts of weapons inside: knives, watermelon knives, daggers, fruit knives, machetes, butcher knives... It was like a collection of domestic-use sharp weapons.

“Pick any one!” Wang Fei said generously.

Considering there were snakes and other similar creatures around the area, as well as rattan and twigs on the hill, Luo Yuan supposed that a short weapon, like a dagger, would be practically useless while a watermelon knife seemed too fragile and would not be able to inflict much damage. After some consideration, he decided upon a machete used for hacking and chopping.

Luo Yuan slashed through the air a few times to try out how it felt in his hands, and was rather satisfied with it. At the same time, he whispered ‘Identify’ silently and a string of words appeared in his head.

“Sharp machete.”

“Material: Alloy.”

“Rarity: White.”

“Weight: 2.5kg.”

“Sharpness: 10 – 15.”

“Equipment Requirement: Strength 9.”

“Remarks: This is a modern agricultural weapon, suitable for land reclamation, wood chopping, and of course capable of killing. Its quality is average, but the blade is strong. It’s perfect for hacking and chopping!”

“Not bad. It’s sharper than the kitchen knives at home,” Luo Yuan thought before saying, “This one.”

“Let's go then! Captain Chen is waiting for us!” Wang Fei said.

The two of them went out the entrance, where everyone was already waiting inside the police car. Luo Yuan picked up his pace and quickly got in the car. The car took off and headed for the outskirts.

After a while, they drove down an avenue and turned into a small road. Both sides of the road were framed by endless green fields.

“This is the farmland, right?” Luo Yuan asked, unsure.

Weeds were all over the farmland. Surprisingly, they reached about a meter in height, covering the soil completely. It looked like a green ocean whenever the wind blew.

“I guess so.” The female cop sitting at the passenger seat also seemed surprised, “I don’t remember the grass being this lush when I came by about 10 days ago. This is unbelievable, the weeds are going to take over the road soon.”

“If the weeds have already grown up to this height, won’t it be worse in the forest? How could you accept this mission, Captain Chen? It’s possible that all of us could go missing too!” Zhao Qiang joked.

“True, I’ve heard that it’s very dangerous up the hill now,” the woman added.

“Tell Chief Inspector Xie if you dare then. Why are you telling me? You could talk to the inspector if you wanted to. I can’t help on this issue,” Captain Chen replied grimly.

He was preoccupied by the sudden increase in missing persons cases as well. There had already been five people missing, and most

of them had come from the village near Zhu Hill. He was more aware of the dangers of Zhu Hill than anyone else. However, he could do nothing but obey the Chief Inspector's orders.

“I guess it can't be that dangerous on the hill, right? All of us are carrying weapons. We could handle the situation, even if we come across a wild boar,” Luo Yuan tried diverting the conversation.

If they continued to discuss this further, the policemen might just go back to the police station after a short drive. That was when the policemen realized that there was a relative of one of the victims with them.

“Alright, stop discussing this. We're policemen. If we surrendered this easily every time we faced adversities, everyone would be laughing at us! We will go up this hill, and we'll head back if it's too dangerous. At least we'll have done something. What do you think, Luo Yuan?” Captain Chen said.

“Sure! If we were all in danger, I think my brother-in-law would do the same thing...,” Luo Yuan replied softly. This was his only choice for now. He could only give up if the mission became too dangerous. Although this would deduct a lot of his EXP, it was still better than losing his life.

Half an hour later, they drove into a remote village and made a stop there. Luo Yuan got out of the police car and looked towards the front. The hill was a stretch of dark green, its eminence less than 200 meters, yet it was enough to distress Luo Yuan.

“It’s almost 11:00 am. Let’s have lunch first and we’ll depart for the hill in an hour!”

Captain Chen shifted his gaze from the hill to his watch as he made his way to a roadside store.

Chapter 3: Noxious Mosquito

The hygienic condition of the village's food joint was relatively bad but its menu was unique, consisting mostly of exotic dishes like rabbit stew, snake soup with shredded bamboo shoot, sliced chicken with fungus, and braised frog. These were all captured by the villagers, and although they were usually rare, they had become pretty common as of late.

Despite the special menu, the atmosphere was rather tense and the conversation halted after some small talk. About 15 minutes later, Captain Chen put down his cutlery and lit up a cigarette. Luo Yuan borrowed Captain Chen's lighter and mimicked him. It was not a habit for him, but he would sometimes smoke when he felt troubled.

"Let's go!" Captain Chen said, standing up after he finished his cigarette.

Everyone stood up and departed in the direction of the base of the hill. Luo Yuan walked last in line and played with the machete, slashing it through thin air. Zhao Qiang turned and watched him. "You are very energetic, aren't you?" he teased Luo Yuan, "There are weeds all over the hill. You'll get to chop them all you want later!"

Luo Yuan did not mind his teasing. "I work out often, so I'm quite fit. You guys can leave it to me to blaze a trail. Just be on the lookout."

Luo Yuan was not really that energetic or enthusiastic. He just wanted to practice his skills using the machete in the meantime. This mission was apparently more dangerous and in this forest his 4-AP Hand-to-Hand Combat seemed to be insufficient compared to having a knife. However, it was not that easy to acquire a new skill. It was not like it could be acquired just by owning a knife and simply hacking or slashing at things. One had to master the basic maneuvers, which required a lot of practice. Take Luo Yuan's Driving Skill, for example. He had acquired it by getting his driving license and even then, he had only gotten a pathetic 1. One could imagine what the level of difficulty in this forest would be like.

"Sure. Looks like we have to rely on you after all!" Zhao Qiang laughed.

The young policewoman could not take it anymore and said, "Zhao Qiang, stop bullying him!" She then turned to Luo Yuan and told him, "It's alright, Luo Yuan. We can take turns later."

"I'm fine, don't worry," Luo Yuan replied with a grin.

"Huang Jiahui, why are you blaming me? He's the one who's volunteered." Zhao Qiang said before murmuring, "It sure helps to be young and handsome!"

The policewoman, whose name he now knew was Huang Jiahui, glared at him but kept quiet.

Wang Fei rushed to say, "Bro Qiang, Sister Hui! I'll take turns

with Luo Yuan since the two of us are the youngest." He was still new on the job, so this would be a good chance for him to prove himself.

"Alright, we'll leave that to Wang Fei and Luo Yuan. The rest of you be on alert and watch our surroundings," Captain Chen finalized the plan.

They passed through the village and reached the end of the cement road. A 2-meter wide farm trail with weeds replaced it at that point. If it weren't for the villagers who used this route regularly, the trail would have probably been blending in with the farmland by now. They stepped on the grass, which felt soft and was actually not that difficult to walk on.

Bristling and hustling sounds came occasionally from the bushes and put everyone on alert considering that nobody knew whether it had been a rat, a snake, or some other kind of creature.

Zhao Qiang, who had been walking in the back, suddenly slapped himself in the face. He checked his palm to find an unfortunate mosquito crushed in a drop of blood.

"Damn it. What a big mosquito!" Zhao Qiang cursed while he scratched his face. He felt an unusual itchiness.

"We're near the forest, the mosquitoes are usually more noxious here. Be on the lookout," Captain Chen reminded his team.

Suddenly, a vigorous movement came from the bushes just a few meters in front of Luo Yuan. The bushes seemed to thrash before a creature jumped out and fled in a flash. It moved like a released arrow, leaving a long impression on the bushes. The leaves had concealed everything so they were not able to see what it had been clearly. The unforeseen movement had frightened Huang Jiahui, who let out a yelp as she patted her own chest. “Oh my God, what the hell was that?”

“Could have been a vole, I guess.” Wang Fei replied uncertainly. He had been walking behind Luo Yuan and had gotten frightened as well.

“A vole? How can a vole be this big? Maybe it was a weasel. It sure scared me,” said Huang Jiahui, fear still lingering in her voice.

Luo Yuan had been walking in front, but he had only seen a vague shape and was not sure what creature it had been either. However, he was sure that it had not been a weasel because weasels were not green. He did not want to add to everyone else’s fear though, so he remained silent.

He took a deep breath and held his knife tightly, continuing to beat the bushes in front of him while focusing on the way he handled the machete. He had been disturbed by the unknown creature earlier. “If the plants have been growing so strangely these past few months, what about the animals? Plants are the producers of the food chain. If they evolve, then the whole ecology will change drastically as well. Perhaps it’s not as obvious or widespread yet, but there must already have been some changes in certain creatures.”

Suddenly, he thought of his canceled mission and he broke out in cold sweat. He had speculated that Qimei Trading would shut down within six months but he had not thought about it any further. There were many factors that could cause such a shutdown, such as insufficient cash flow, financial issues or pissing off people in powerful positions. However, when he combined everything he had encountered in the past few days, he came to a shocking, impossible conclusion – Trade could be suspended.

“There must have been some changes in the ocean as well if there had already been changes on the land. Once sea freight started experiencing problems, the number of affected companies and people would be unpredictable.” The world seemed to be experiencing some sort of major changes. Luo Yuan lived in the city, and while he had been made aware of these changes by the media, he hadn’t thought that it was serious enough to attract his full attention. He would probably still have been ignorant if he had not visited this village.

“No wonder the price of rice has skyrocketed and the frequency of bank interest rate has increased suspiciously. I should prepare myself after completing this mission,” Luo Yuan thought.

After a while, they arrived at the base of the hill, where they found what seemed to be a trail covered by thorny plants and bushes. When Luo Yuan saw Zhao Qiang scratching his face and the lump the size of a baby’s fist that had just formed on it, he asked curiously, “What happened to your face?”

“It’s the sting from that mosquito. It’s so itchy!” Zhao Qiang

huffed as he checked his gun and scratched his face a few more times.

Huang Jiahui came over to check it out and looked completely shocked. "Oh! How could the mosquitoes here be so noxious? I should've applied for leave today. I won't be able to face anyone if I get stung like this."

Wang Fei held in his laughter while he said, "Maybe Bro Qiang has sensitive skin. I used to have a classmate like this. He'd always get a big lump whenever he got stung."

"F*ck off, my skin is perfectly normal. Did any of you bring any rosewater or ointment?" Zhao Qiang asked, scowling at them.

Luo Yuan had thought that it was probably skin sensitivity as well, but that was apparently not the case according to Zhao Qiang. He was surprised. "Looks like the animals are mutating too. How could a mosquito be so noxious otherwise?"

"Put some saliva on it. Use what you have." Captain Chen was quite happy to see Zhao Qiang's almost deformed face. The guy was a sore thumb at the station. He was always uncooperative and seemed to enjoy complaining about everything. The captain had wanted to teach him a lesson for a long time. "It'll be fine soon. Alright, let's go up the hill now. Luo Yuan, you go first."

Luo Yuan put his thoughts aside and walked towards the forest carefully, holding on to his machete.

Chapter 4: Spooky Forest

The road that led up the hill was not steep. However, the thorny plants made it difficult for them to walk. As they went further into the forest, the weeds were replaced by big trees. Their trunks were thick and there were plenty of branches growing out covering the trail. If they did not remove them, they would not be able to walk any farther.

The trees formed a leafy canopy that covered the sun and made the trail darker. There were a few beams of light penetrating the gaps between the lush branches, which made them all feel like they were walking through an ancient forest. The barren forest had become a playground for wild animals. They could hear insects buzzing and birds chirping around them. Every once in awhile, they also saw pheasants and rabbits. No one knew where those animals came from. Luo Yuan pushed the branches aside and chopped the thorny plants on the ground so that they could keep going.

“Beep. After a sufficient period of practice, you have mastered the basic knife skills.”

Luo Yuan felt pumped up. The knife skills seemed to be easier to master compared to the driving skill. He opened the attribute board and realized he had obtained a point for his knife skills. He looked at his remaining four points and after some short consideration, allocated all of them to the knife skills. He now had five points for his knife skills. He definitely would not have done that under other circumstances considering the only other job that required knife skills was being a chef. His four-point bare-hand fighting skills had always been enough to protect himself.

However, the world seemed to be changing and no one was able to predict the future. The knife skills would be very important in the forest as this mission was a dangerous one. That was the best time for him to upgrade them, and he felt so pumped up and excited at the same time. He could feel that there were some kind of illusions forming in his head but he could not distinguish them clearly. He was idle for a few seconds before he felt some changes in the way he was holding the knife. His body and muscles became hard.

He instinctively tried to control his posture and widened his legs a little. After adjusting his stance, he subconsciously started playing with the knife again. In the blink of an eye, all the leaves in front of him were minced into confetti. Huang Jiahui had happened to watch the scene. She quickly covered her mouth and asked, "Yuan, have you practiced martial arts before?"

"Oh, yes. I have." Luo Yuan replied when he recovered.

"I see. I've practiced free combat before, when I was in the police academy, but I didn't learn how to fight with a knife because it's not as useful as a gun," Huang Jiahui replied.

"It's in the nature of men to show off in front of ladies. Regardless of whether they like them or not," Wang Fei said with jealousy.

"What you did was real, right? That is awesome!" She thought it was unbelievable.

In fact, Luo Yuan could move 1.5 times faster than the average person. When he combined his knife skills with his flexibility, his fighting ability became astonishing. He could kill anyone before they could even utter a word.

Dexterity did not refer to speed. It referred to ones' reflexes. It was not a common thing to be able to react 1.5 times faster than most people. His path-clearing speed got faster and faster. His knife-holding and plant-chopping posture had been wrong earlier, which had consumed a lot more of his energy. Since gaining five points in his knife skills, he could fully utilize them and work more efficiently. He cut a bunch of branches down without looking at them, and watched the leaves fall from the trees. However, when his knife made contact with the next branch, he felt something strangely soft touch him.

He took a look and yelled, "Snake!"

He quickly retreated as he felt his head and limbs go numb. It was a green snake with a big triangle-shaped head. Its body was slim, but it was about two meters in length. Luo Yuan butchered it, almost cutting it in two, leaving only a thin layer of skin connecting the two parts of its body.

"Sssssss."

The snake struggled vigorously despite its agony, exposing its fangs while producing more sounds of suffering.

“What happened?” Captain Chen asked, seeing how stunned Luo Yuan looked. He quickly pulled out his gun and walked towards him.

“There was a snake, and it looked poisonous! I killed it, though,” Luo Yuan replied when he recovered a few seconds later.

“It’s a bamboo snake! Everybody watch out! Those of you who haven’t tightened your trousers, please do it now!” Captain Chen lifted up the snake using a tree branch and threw it farther away while talking to the members of his team. Silently he was thinking, “Bamboo snakes are usually less than a meter long. I’ve never seen one reach more than two meters! I have no idea what the consequences would be if we got bitten.”

He then looked at Luo Yuan, who was still in panic, and asked him whether he needed someone to take turns with him. Luo Yuan looked at Wang Fei and Zhao Qiang before replying, “I’m good. We just need to be more careful, but it should be fine.” He knew both of them had gotten frightened and would not be able to help with anything.

If one of the cops of the team got injured, the mission would come to an end. He needed their assistance. It would be extremely dangerous for him to go on alone if everyone decided to return. Although he was still really scared of snakes, he could now kill them easily using his abilities and quick reflexes. His self-defense skills were the strongest out of them all. Plus, it would be more dangerous if he had no weapons.

"Alright," Captain Chen looked happy with his answer. He had

not been happy at first when Luo Yuan had insisted on following the team, but now he realized that he might actually contribute more than his subordinates.

"I can give you my cap. Please be more careful, Yuan." Wang Fei said, feeling awkward.

"I'm good, thanks for offering. I heard that bamboo snakes usually attack by jumping down from tree branches. I'm relatively safe actually. It's safer if you wear a cap," Luo Yuan replied with a smile.

It was in the human nature to try to avoid danger. Even Luo Yuan himself would not have simply entered the forest if he had not been allowed to join the rescue mission. Huang Jiahui looked pale after listening to Luo Yuan. He immediately regretted it. He was afraid that they would just give up and return home. He stopped talking and started walking again.

Huang Jiahui quickly walked towards Luo Yuan and followed him, staying right behind him. She had seen him play with the knife and she believed that that was not a normal skill level. She could not see clearly enough, but she felt that he was very mysterious after recalling the scene of him playing with the knife. She thought that it was best to stick with him for safety. They had reached the end of the road already. The trail was now covered completely by branches. They could only rely on Luo Yuan to find the way.

A black animal appeared in the bushes and then disappeared again. It stood at the grove nearby and stared at them. It was as big

as a dog but it looked like a cat with its smooth body and shiny fur that looked like silk. Its cruel eyes were shining like ambers and there was fresh blood dripping from its mouth. Luo Yuan halted immediately and held up his knife in front of his chest, ready to attack.

"Looks like a leopard," said Huang Jiahui with a shaky voice while carefully leaning forward.

Luo Yuan also thought it was a leopard. But how could a leopard be wandering around there?

Bang! Bang!

Everyone had panicked except Captain Chen and Zhao Qiang, who had responded fast by pulling out their guns and firing. The animal got scared and quickly escaped into the grove, crying out loudly.

"That must have been a wildcat. Too bad we didn't get it." Captain Chen checked, but could not see any blood. "Everyone be more careful. Wildcats are very vindictive. It might come back again," he said.

Hearing that it had just been a wildcat, Wang Fei said, "I'm worried that it won't come back. I haven't tried wildcat meat before." He was afraid of those beasts, but subconsciously he did not take wildcats seriously as he thought they were weaker than other wild animals.

“Look who’s getting his courage back! I hope you don’t pee on your pants later,” Zhao Qiang made fun of him.

Wang Fei was aware that he had underperformed earlier and he retorted loudly, "What's so scary about it? It was just a cat!"

Captain Chen remained silent and somber. He had grown up in a village. He knew that wildcats were fierce, but he had never seen such a big one. A tiger might not have been able to bring down this cat. They were lucky they had guns with them, otherwise they would have just died. Luo Yuan continued cutting down branches so they could keep moving. As he moved on, the groves kept getting lushier, so he decided to take a break and rest for a while.

He could have continued for a little bit longer, however, it would not have been such a good idea to use up all his energy now. He decided not to. When he was about to turn around and tell the team that he needed a rest, he saw something flash across the way.

He lowered his voice and said, "Watch out! That thing has come back again. It’s behind you."

Everyone quickly lifted their guns and checked in every direction, but they did not see anything at all.

"Are you sure it’s here?" Wang Fei asked cockily as he kept swinging his gun around.

“WATCH OUT!” Captain Chen pulled Wang Fei to him and

started firing at something behind him.

Wang Fei turned pale as bullets passed by his ears. He could sense death near him. He felt his legs go numb and he slumped down on the thorny bushes nearby, getting a few bloody scratches on his face. No one had the time to look after him.

Roar!

The wildcat moaned, causing an uproar. In the blink of an eye, a black shadow rushed towards Captain Chen without any warning.

Chapter 5: The Snake Trail

“Bang! Bang!”

They started to fire. A dark shadow rushed out and took a big leap, jumping on Captain Chen and grabbing his neck. Captain Chen was shocked when he saw the wildcat. His entire body tensed until he could not move at all. Luo Yuan immediately sped up his steps and rushed towards Captain Chen. He used his own shoulder to hit the wildcat. The animal flew into the air thanks to Luo Yuan’s sudden momentum. It landed on the ground and rolled around for a few seconds before getting up. It shook its head. Apparently, it was still dizzy from the hit. Luo Yuan immediately slashed at its body before it had enough time to get over its dizziness.

Although it was not sharp enough, the machete was still good at chopping and killing.

“Crack!”

The wildcat’s backbone cracked and broke, its body splitting into two pieces. The animal moaned in pain. It kept on struggling, its limbs still moving like it was trying to crawl away. Its internal organs slipped out of its body, getting dragged all over the ground. The air smelled like blood.

“Bang! Bang!”

Zhao Qiang quickly fired two more shots to make sure that the

wildcat was dead.

“Bloody cat!”

He shot the wildcat on the head until it stopped struggling.

Huang Jiahui could not stand the gory scene or the disgusting smell. She walked to the side and threw up in the bushes.

Luo Yuan was not feeling well either. He had not had enough time to think about it. He had just rushed straight ahead and killed the wildcat. His hand was still shaking because of the unexpected attack, and so was the rest of his body. Since when had he become so brave? He had no idea.

Wang Fei covered his face and crawled out of the bushes. “Captain, this is already too dangerous. We don’t have the manpower to handle a situation like this. If a wildcat can injure us this bad, then I can’t imagine what we’ll come across if we continue any farther. I think it’s enough. We can’t find the people who have gone missing!”

Everyone looked tired after hearing Wang Fei’s words. The worst had happened.

Luo Yuan, who was already feeling upset, said, “I won’t believe that my brother-in-law is dead until I find his dead body! The least we can do is go check!”

“You have no right to speak! You can keep going if you want to die, but you can’t drag us along!” Wang Fei exploded, yelling at Luo Yuan.

Luo Yuan looked at Wang Fei, wondering why he had thrown such a tantrum. He had not offended him before, but now he was pissed off. “You can go if you’re afraid. You have been completely useless anyway.”

His words triggered Wang Fei’s anger. He felt insulted and suddenly pulled out his gun and pointed it at Luo Yuan. “You son of the b*tch! Say that again!” he said, looking extremely mad.

“No!” Huang Jiahui screamed. She never imagined that Wang Fei would do something like this. He had always been an introvert, but now he seemed to have acted on impulse.

“Wang Fei! Put your gun down now!” Captain Chen ordered him, his expression very serious.

Wang Fei felt bad. He hesitated when Captain Chen yelled at him. His ego though made him go on. He raised his voice and said, “Captain, I don’t intend to disobey your orders, but I want him to apologize!”

At that moment, Luo Yuan was thinking about a lot of things. He would have been lying if he said that he had not been afraid. His heartbeat had gotten faster when he had looked up the barrel of that gun, his brain had stopped functioning, and he had felt the presence of Death himself near him. He had almost knelt to the

ground and asked for forgiveness. He had not, however. He would not bow down to someone with a gun. That was an insult!

All these thoughts flashed across his mind as he slowly calmed down and realized that things were not as bad as he had thought. He did not believe that Wang Fei would have fired in front of everyone. Not if he had any common sense. Furthermore, the distance between Wang Fei and him had been only about two meters. He could have actually broken his arms or even killed Wang Fei if he acted faster and more decisively. Of course, it would not have been the best thing to do and it would only have made things worse.

"Put your gun down if you want me to apologize," he said, "You would have already been dead if Captain Chen had not reacted fast enough to save you! It doesn't matter if you're afraid now. I'm following Captain Chen. If he wants us to return, then I won't say a word."

These words were kind of tricky. He had shunned Wang Fei but had also hinted at his effort in rescuing the Captain so that the cops would not unite together against him. Captain Chen's facial expression became serious. He was thinking about how Luo Yuan had rescued him from the wildcat. Had it not been for him, he would have been dead now. He knew that he should show some gratitude in return.

"Wang Fei, I want you to put your gun down now! Do you hear me?" he yelled at him.

"Captain... Captain...", Wang Fei tried to argue, but he sounded

afraid.

“Hey, just put your gun down!” Zhao Qiang told him. He did not like Wang Fei either.

Wang Fei stared at Luo Yuan, but decided to put his gun down.

Luo Yuan did not bother looking at him. He walked towards Captain Chen and said sincerely, “My apologies, Captain. I know I said some things in anger. Please accept my apology.”

Captain Chen calmed down and replied, “It’s alright. I understand how you feel. It is not easy for you and I believe anyone would feel the same way in your position. However, it is indeed dangerous here. If we haven’t found them by the time we get to the peak, then we’ll have to return. What do you think?”

They had to find the people who were missing. Otherwise, it would not be the same.

“Deal,” Luo Yuan replied before adding, “I know that the chances are low, but at least there is still some hope. If we give up, then they will be hopeless.” Nobody cared about him apologizing to Wang Fei anymore.

Huang Jiahui walked up to Luo Yuan and tried to comfort him. “Are you alright? Wang Fei is still new to the job. He has to train more. Don’t take it seriously.”

Luo Yuan replied, "I'm fine, don't worry."

"What's it like to be threatened at gunpoint?" Zhao Qiang asked with a smile as he walked over.

"I still can't feel my legs," Luo Yuan said with an awkward smile.

Zhao Qiang gave him a thumbs up, expressing his respect that way. He had seen many different kinds of people having various reactions when they had a gun pointed at their head. Most of them knelt down immediately and asked for forgiveness. Others peed or pooped in their pants. That was the first time that he had ever seen someone react like Luo Yuan had. No one had bothered to check on Wang Fei, who was just standing somewhere nearby, feeling dissatisfied and jealous.

They hadn't been there long, but they could hear so many strange sounds now. A big rat squeezed out of the bushes. It looked at them, then looked at the dead body. It seemed to hesitate for a moment.

Captain Chen immediately became alert and got up from the ground. "Let's go, we can't stay here anymore. The blood will attract other animals," he told the team.

"Captain Chen, What if we just shouted the victims' names since we're already half-way to the top? They would respond if they could hear us," Huang Jiahui suggested.

“Okay, but lets leave this area first. Shouting might disturb any animals that are nearby,” Captain Chen replied.

Although Luo Yuan was exhausted, he felt slightly better after taking a short rest. He continued to remove plants and branches as he kept moving forward. They met many animals along the way. They were all attracted by the smell of blood, but none of them attacked them.

When they were 10 meters away, they started shouting for the victims. They got no response. Luo Yuan was getting more worried by the minute. He suspected that Chen Weiqiang was dead.

“Look! Is that a shirt over there?” Huang Jiahui shouted while pointing at an object somewhere ahead.

Luo Yuan suddenly felt energized and rushed over to the direction where Huang Jiahui had pointed.

“Seems like it. There is a walkway! Perhaps, they used it to get up here. Captain, can we go and check?” Luo Yuan suggested.

“Alright, let’s go!” Captain Chen replied.

About 10 minutes later, they were there.

The trail was narrow and all the plants around it were crooked and damaged. A blood-stained sleeve hung from a branch.

"The blood looks fresh. Probably less than two days old. Could be the Mayor's or someone else's from the group!" Captain Chen said.

He then squatted down to check on their surroundings.

"There is blood on the ground. They were probably attacked by a beast. They must have run downhill to escape. Let's find them!"

Luo Yuan nodded and took off quickly. Everyone acted very fast but the blood stains stopped after about 10 meters. They came across a winding trail full of branches. The trail was about a foot in width and it looked very strange. Every single curve looked similar and all of them looked like they'd measured precisely.

Luo Yuan looked lost in thought as he studied the winding trail.

Suddenly he shouted, "What the f*ck! Is that a snake trail?"

Zhao Qiang immediately raised his handgun in alert before saying, "If its trail is so big, I can't imagine how big the snake is."

Luo Yuan saw Wang Fei retreat quietly and stand behind everyone. He was sure he would have run away if he did not worry about his safety.

"It's your call, Luo Yuan. Shall we check it out or return home?" Captain Chen left the decision up to Luo Yuan.

Huang Jiahui quickly said, "Let's just return. I don't think your brother-in-law is still alive."

Luo Yuan remained silent for a moment. Then he said, "Captain Chen, I can return home right now and just assume that my brother-in-law is dead." He hesitated for a few seconds before he continued, "I can leave, but you cannot. That snake is already very big, and it will grow even bigger if the weather continues to be like this. When the time comes that its appetite cannot be satisfied by the forest animals anymore, it will come down to the village, and then to the city, to find food. You are all cops. Eventually, you are the ones who are going to have to fight it. You can't just run from it!"

"Don't you think it would be easier to kill a snake that has just had a huge feast and is too heavy to move, rather than fight a giant hungry snake?" Luo Yuan asked.

"How do you know it can't move?" Wang Fei grabbed the opportunity to challenge him.

Luo Yuan stared at him like he was stupid. He answered, "No matter how big a snake is, it needs at least a few days to digest after it has swallowed several people. It wouldn't move much during that time because its movement would be constrained by its heavy body. Thus, it would be slightly less dangerous to attack."

Luo Yuan looked at Captain Chen and waited for his decision. He could not do anything further. He could only accept his failure if

Captain Chen gave up. He was not prepared to fight the snake alone. Besides, his fear of snakes might not allow him to fully utilize his talents.

After long consideration, Captain Chen looked at Luo Yuan and said, "Let's hope that what you've just said is true. Let's do this for the village!"

He still maintained some sense of justice. He knew that this was the best time for them to kill the snake and that things would only get worse if they didn't do it. Even Wang Fei had kept his mouth shut.

It felt oppressive to walk on the snake trail. They could all estimate its strength and size by looking at the crooked trees and branches along the way. Just the snake's tail would be enough to cripple them if it accidentally hit them.

Luo Yuan felt truly worried. His palms were sweaty and the sweat dripped on the handle of his knife and made it slippery. He did not know what she would think of him if she knew how scared he was. Everyone was on alert and walked very carefully. They were all sweating after a while.

About 30 minutes later, they arrived at the end of the trail. Before them was a barren deserted land with dry crooked branches. The place was beyond any imagination. They immediately got down on the ground to catch their breath. Apparently, this was what the habitat of a snake looked like.

“Wang Fei, you go and check it out. Don't disturb it, though!” Captain Chen ordered him softly.

He wanted Luo Yuan to go, but he had been helping out a lot along the journey while his own subordinates had not contributed much in comparison. He felt ashamed to let Luo Yuan take the risk.

Wang Fei turned pale instantly. He looked at his colleagues, then at Luo Yuan. Luo Yuan looked back at him and smiled sarcastically. He seemed to be challenging him.

Wang Fei got angry and said, “Fine, I'll go!”

He regretted it the moment he said it. However, he could not take his words back. He slowly took out his handgun and moved forward like he was walking to his own execution. He had only been walking for about 10 minutes when he felt his legs go numb and he slumped down against the ground. He was too afraid to go any farther.

Captain Chen's facial expression changed instantly. “You're embarrassing the entire police force!”

Zhao Qiang chuckled and said, “I'll go then.”

Luo Yuan laughed silently. He could not believe that Wang Fei had dared point a gun at him just because he'd felt insulted, and yet could not face his own fears despite the fact that he was armed.

Captain Chen nodded, agreeing with Zhao Qiang's suggestion.

Zhao Qiang used to be in the army before, so he got down on the ground and crawled forward fast. After a few minutes, he reached the spot where Wang Fei was lying. He took his gun and stuffed it into his own pocket. He continued moving forward, not even bothering to check on Wang Fei.

A moment later, Zhao Qiang returned. However, his cockiness had disappeared. He looked white as a sheet.

Chapter 6: A Near Escape

“What a big snake... It was huge...,” Zhao Qiang murmured. His expression was a mixture of fear and excitement.

“Be more precise!” Captain Chen said, interrupting him.

Zhao Qiang took a deep breath to get his emotions under control before saying, “Its body was as thick as my waist, and its stomach was so big it looked like it couldn’t move. It’s sleeping on the hillside like a log.”

“Oh, yes!” Zhao Qiang seemed to remember something else. “It looked like a king ratsnake!” he added.

Their faces darkened.

“Are you sure you’re not wrong?” Captain Chen asked doubtfully.

“Of course I am. How could I be wrong? I’ve caught snakes like this before,” Zhao Qiang said unhappily.

Luo Yuan knew all about king ratsnakes. He used to see them all the time when he was young and living with his parents in the village. They were supposed to be approximately two to three meters long, and about as thick as a human arm. It was impossible for a king ratsnake to be as thick as Zhao Qiang had described it to be.

Still, Luo Yuan was slightly relieved. It was always less stressful to face a non-venomous animal than a venomous one.

“We’ve only got one chance. A bloated snake will not attack. As long as we do not provoke it, we should be able to walk by safely. Then we’ll take our guns out, shoot it on the head and run. Understand?” Captain Chen asked gravely.

“Alright!”

“Everyone check your guns again. Zhao Qiang, pass Wang Fei’s gun to Luo Yuan. You know how to use one, right? The safety is off, all you need to do is pull the trigger!” Captain Chen said after thinking for a second. It would be safer with more people carrying a gun. As for Wang Fei, they would just let him lie prostrate there for the time being. Getting him back now would only alarm the snake.

Luo Yuan took the gun in his hand. It was the first time he held a gun. Maybe it was because of the depressing atmosphere, but he was not as excited as he thought he’d be. He checked the gun like everybody else. Wang Fei had not fired at all throughout the journey, so the gun was still fully loaded.

“Well... Let’s go now!” Captain Chen said in a deep voice after a short hesitation.

All of a sudden, Luo Yuan’s heart started beating fast. His legs felt like they were floating in the air. He felt completely powerless. Yet

he astonishingly followed the rest of the team by creeping along. He was not the last one in line. He was followed tightly by Huang Jiahui, who was holding on to the edge of Luo Yuan's shirt. Her hands were shaking, and Luo Yuan could feel her shivers.

He realized that he was not as brave as he had thought. When his fear reached a certain level, his timidity took over his emotions completely. If it had been any other animal, he may have been braver. However, since that time in school when someone had played a practical joke on him by putting a water snake down his back, he had started to fear the cold-blooded animals.

The faint smell of rotten fish wafted up from the hillside. It was utterly revolting.

They all walked over to Wang Fei before suddenly slowing down.

“Don't talk from now on. Just watch my hand signals before you act!” Captain Chen said in a soft voice. Then he crossed over the hillside and waved his hand. Zhao Qiang followed without any hesitation.

Luo Yuan took a deep breath and followed them. As soon as he climbed up the hillside, he saw the giant snake that was lying there.

Although he had been mentally preparing for it, he still felt a shiver down his spine when he actually saw it.

The snake was more than 10 meters long and its huge body was adorned with shiny, glossy scales with a tactile impression of metal. Luo Yuan doubted that its scales were bulletproof. They radiated under the sunlight producing a rainbow-like halo. Its stomach was bulging and its whole body looked like a giant olive. It was the kind of creature that could cause terror even from afar.

The area around it was very quiet. The group's heavy breathing was the only sound to be heard.

In today's modern peaceful society, hardly anybody could keep their cool when seeing such a creature. Modern education enhanced people's knowledge but neglected their body; it increased the number of wise men but reduced the number of brave men. Therefore, anyone able to contain their terror and not scream in such a situation must possess unique inner qualities.

Captain Chen looked at them and signaled for them to keep up with him before he started creeping towards the snake's head.

The team slowly surrounded its body, stopping at a distance of 3 to 4 meters from its head.

The giant snake's amber-like, ice-cold eyes were not moving and its pupils were slightly dilated. It seemed like it was asleep. Luo Yuan noticed that the black stripes on the top of its head formed a symbol. That symbol was a clear characteristic of its kind – it was indeed a king ratsnake.

Its whole body was releasing that dreadful breath that could

freeze one's blood.

Luo Yuan's heart was racing at a tremendous speed. He switched the gun to his right hand and held onto the knife with his left hand. He kept taking deep breaths. He looked as pale as a corpse.

Huang Jiahui, who was right behind him, looked even worse. Her body suddenly felt like jelly and she held onto Luo Yuan's arm even tighter while the softer parts of her body were pressing up against him. Luo Yuan had no time to enjoy the feeling of her supple breasts, though. Instead, his face darkened.

He thought he might get killed because of this woman when they all started firing and the snake struggled to survive.

Captain Chen made a signal to attack and pointed his gun towards the snake's eye.

Luo Yuan struggled slightly, but Huang Jiahui held onto him even tighter. Anxiety clouded his eyes but he could no longer do anything other than point the gun towards the snake's head.

Time seemed to stop. Every second felt like years; sweat was dripping down everyone's forehead, hitting the ground and splashing into tiny crystals.

“Fire!”

Almost at the exact same moment, three guns fired scorching hot

bullets, one after the other. No one could miss at such short distance. Even Luo Yuan, who had never held a gun before, hit the target.

Drops of blood splattered from the head of the giant snake. Its amber-like eye was blown off, a deep bloody hole forming in its place. The sleeping snake could never have expected such a great loss.

The pain made it wake up with a start and raise its huge head. It moved as fast as lightning, its shadow the only thing that could be seen. It also somehow stirred up the atmosphere, causing a sudden fierce wind.

However, the movement lasted only for a second before its head fell back to the ground. The dying snake was writhing violently, its mouth open wide while it hissed.

The bullet had not just blown off its eye, it had also pierced its brain. As snakes are strong creatures though, it could not die so easily.

It destroyed everything in the vicinity, its tail swinging around rapidly as it produced a loud sonic boom. All the trees nearby were snapped off, and debris and sand were thrust out in every direction like bullets, causing small red dots to form on their skin when they hit them.

Luo Yuan pulled along Huang Jiahui, who would still not let go of him, and ran desperately towards a densely wooded area.

Meanwhile, he heard a distant cry of terror. He did not recognize who it was.

He cursed silently. Huang Jiahui was a burden to him. With his speed, he could have been safe by now. He so far as felt the urge to kill her.

The exploding firework-like sounds heard continuously from behind them and the strong howling wind made them envision their own sudden deaths.

He was dragging along Huang Jiahui, which caused his energy to drain fast after only a short distance of running. His lungs were burning and he did not feel like he could run anymore. When he spotted a huge tree ahead, he ran desperately using every last bit of his energy. He reached the back of the tree and leant his body heavily against its trunk while his legs trembled.

Huang Jiahui did not look satisfied though, and hugged his waist even tighter. Her body started shivering.

Luo Yuan no longer had any energy, so he just let her hug him.

He closed his eyes and felt the life pulsating within his body. It might be because he was facing death, but he suddenly felt the will to live.

As time passed, all movement around them gradually reduced.

Luo Yuan pushed Huang Jiahui away, wanting to go out and take a look.

“Don’t. My legs are still numb!” Huang Jiahui hid her head in Luo Yuan’s chest and hugged him tighter.

“Please, just sit here. I will go take a look. If the snake is dead, then we can go!”

“Okay!” Huang Jiahui let go of Luo Yuan, her body swaying and falling to the ground.

Luo Yuan reached out to help her. He had not recovered his strength yet though, so he ended up being pulled to the ground.

They were face to face, close enough to smell each other’s breath. Their hearts were beating fast. Luo Yuan instinctively wanted to stand up, but when he thought of how he had almost gotten killed because of her, he suddenly became angry.

He might still be alive, but he did not plan on letting her off the hook that easily. He looked at her tender sweet lips, and planted a vengeful kiss on them.

He could not have predicted her reaction.

Huang Jiahui struggled only for a bit, and then she started to react intensely, kissing him in a more impulsive manner. Much like the sparks landing on the dry log next to them, the kiss burned

out of control.

Chapter 7: A Dexterity Point

“Huang Jiahui!”

“Xiao Luo!”

Somebody was shouting for them. Both Luo Yuan and Huang Jiahui were in shock. They separated and straightened themselves hurriedly before walking out around the back of the tree.

“There you are. Were the two of you doing something naughty?” Zhao Qiang smiled ambiguously. There were blood stains on his face.

Huang Jiahui blushed bright red.

Luo Yuan was more brazen. Maintaining a neutral facial expression, he calmly changed the topic by saying, “My legs were just numb. What about the snake?”

“It’s dead. How can it not be after we shot it so many times? It was tremendous, though. If it hadn’t been bloated, it might have killed us,” Zhao Qiang grinned.

Suddenly, Luo Yuan remembered something. He opened up his properties window only to find out that the mission had not been completed yet. He found it strange and wondered why. Could it be that Chen Weiqiang had not been killed by this particular snake, or perhaps that he was still alive?

Then he realized that the properties window seemed to have changed somewhat. When he checked out all the details, he was overjoyed.

He had earned an extra point for his Willpower, which had now reached 12 points and was his second best property after intelligence.

He recalled his terrible performance while facing the giant snake and thought, “It seems that Willpower is related to my mental state.” Frankly, he did not care much about his Willpower. If it wasn’t for that incident, he might have continued to neglect it.

A brave man should be fearless. Being strong did not only require a strong body and an intelligent brain, but also a powerful soul. Although Willpower did not affect any other properties, it was still as important as any of them.

During the fight, his 11-point Willpower had been higher than that of the average person, but he had been so terrified that his weakness had taken control of his limbs. He had not been able to use his full strength when facing a danger that was bigger than he had expected. If he had not been persistent, he would have been as paralyzed as Huang Jiahui. When it came to this, he was not as brave as Zhao Qiang and Captain Chen, who were both experienced cops.

“Xiao Luo, give me your knife. I want to cut open the snake’s stomach. I have called the station. Someone will be here soon to

carry it out,” said Captain Chen while walking towards him. He looked at the snake’s stomach as well. He was certain that those missing would be found dead inside it.

Luo Yuan passed him the knife and followed him.

The scenery was a complete mess. Trees had been uprooted or slanted, and the terrain had also changed dramatically. It looked like the whole area had just been struck by a hurricane.

A giant snake lay dead on the ground before them. Its mouth was closed tightly with its long forked scarlet tongue left outside while blood gushed out. The body was still twitching every once in awhile. Apparently, it had not turned stiff yet.

Huang Jiahui looked at it from afar; her face was pale, her body swayed and she seemed to be about to collapse again.

“It’s not dead yet, is it?” Luo Yuan asked.

“Close enough. In fact, it is dead. This is just neural spasms,” Captain Chen replied coarsely.

“Let me shoot it one more time!” Zhao Qiang lifted his gun and fired.

Bang!

The bullet struck the giant snake, drops of blood spattering around. Its body twitched a little before it finally stiffened.

“Should be safe. Let’s go!” Captain Chen said, looking relieved.

“Where’s Wang Fei?” Luo Yuan asked as he could not see him around.

“He was unlucky. He got hit by a rolling stone while he was lying prone on the ground and broke his leg!” Zhao Qiang said disdainfully, pursing his lips. He clearly despised Wang Fei.

Luo Yuan was pleased to hear it. He was not a saint, but he always repaid kindness with kindness and hatred with hatred. Even though he felt a bit disappointed that he had not done it himself, the news still made him happy.

The giant snake seemed to be really dead now. It was not moving at all when they walked by it. However, when they were about to cut its stomach open, the animal twitched suddenly, scaring them all. In order to avoid any further accident, they waited for another half an hour to let it get even stiffer.

They tore off some of its scales, which were each the size of a small palm, to expose the snake’s white belly. Captain Chen lifted the knife and got ready to cut.

The skin was very tough and slippery, so the knife kept slipping. The fact that it had been used to chop off bushes earlier meant that

it had gotten blunt. Thus, Captain Chen managed to cut only half an inch, and he achieved that by using up most of his energy.

“Just let me do it!” Luo Yuan suggested. He could not stand watching him anymore.

“Alright!” Captain Chen shook his head and passed the knife to Luo Yuan. He shook his aching wrist and said with a bitter smile, “This skin is too tough. Put a few of them together, one on top of the other, and you’ll have yourself a bulletproof vest!”

Luo Yuan was intrigued. “I am interested in it. Can I please have some?”

“Sure, it’s not a big deal,” Captain Chen said indifferently, “After all, you did have a part in killing it too. We’ll just split it into equal parts.”

“Unfortunately, its meat must not taste good. It’s disgusting just thinking of the corpses there must be in it,” Zhao Qiang said, looking disgusted. He usually did not mind eating wild animals, but he dared not eat this particular snake.

Luo Yuan smiled and took the machete knife. He examined it carefully, touching the tip to test its sharpness. He opened his legs slightly and focused while holding the knife with both hands.

Then he swung it down and a stretch of white light flashed like lightning. If the scene had been playing in slow motion, one could

have seen the tip of the knife just barely touch the skin. It had been fast though, producing only a short soft sound.

A two-inches long smooth cut had been formed on the tough skin. The depth of the cut was less than 1 mm, and there wasn't even any blood oozing out.

Everyone was surprised to see it. Such advanced knife skill was like art. It looked truly marvelous.

Luo Yuan breathed out. It looked amazing, but it was only his ability to control his strength perfectly and cut faster. A normal person could achieve it too with a couple of years of practice.

The ability to control one's strength was crucial when handling a knife. Nevertheless, his 5-point knife-skill still needed some time to improve. He had to learn how to focus if he wanted his every cut to be accurate.

Luo Yuan made one more cut and then rested for a while. He repeated this process dozens of times until the skin was finally cut open. The inner organs flowed out slowly, and the atmosphere became heavy with that stinky smell. The bloated stomach looked like an over-inflated balloon. Luo Yuan looked at Captain Chen.

Captain Chen nodded heavily.

Luo Yuan took a deep breath and cut it open little by little using the machete knife.

Four corpses covered in gastric acid fell out. The gastric acid splattered all around. Luo Yuan jumped away.

The acid had altered the corpses beyond recognition. The head and some other parts of the bodies had been completely digested, leaving behind only bones. Therefore, the identities of those corpses could not be confirmed. Luo Yuan took only a look before his stomach churned.

The other two men looked just as sick.

Suddenly, a mechanical sound was heard in Luo Yuan's mind. "Ting! F+ Level Mission 'Investigation of the Disappearance of Chen Weiqiang' has been completed. Mission Completed in: 19 hours 35 min. Mission Evaluation: Good!"

"Basic Experience Value Reward 400!"

"Good Evaluation, Experience Value +200!"

"You have leveled up. You have been rewarded 1 property point and 5 skill points. Your current level is Level 4!"

"Your energy and injuries will all be recovered!"

"Finally I have leveled up." Luo Yuan was delighted, but soon he became sad. Although he had not been very close to Chen

Weiqiang, they had at least been friends. If the mission had been completed, then that meant that he was one of the corpses.

He turned on the properties window.

Character: Luo Yuan

Profession: Foreign Trade Specialist at Qimei Foreign Trading Co. Ltd

Level: 4

Experience: 300/2400

Attributes:-

Strength: 10 (10)

Dexterity: 11 (10)

Physique: 11 (10)

Intelligence: 13 (10)

Sensory Perception: 10 (10)

Willpower: 12(10)

Skills: Science 16, Math 14, Mandarin 19, English 16, Finance 17,

Computers 9, Dancing 1, Drawing 3, Gaming 6, Negotiating 9,

Networking 7, Cooking 3, Driving 1, Hand-to-Hand Combat 4,

Knife Skills 5

Unique Skill: Identification

Unassigned Property Points: 1

Unassigned Skill Points: 5

Incomplete Missions: None

When it came to the physical properties, Luo Yuan used to analyze them roughly. He divided them into three categories: One, the ones that were difficult to upgrade, such as Intelligence and Dexterity, whereby upgrades were limited no matter how hard one tried; two, the ones that were moderately difficult to upgrade, such as Strength and Physique, whereby upgrades could be easy if you trained hard enough, but after you reached a certain level they

became more difficult; and three, the ones that were easy to upgrade, such as Willpower and Sensory Perception. Although the method to upgrade Sensory Perception was not yet known, upgrading it should be fast after one managed to identify the method.

As the property point received from each level up was very precious, Luo Yuan would definitely not use it without putting some thought into it first. Each property point required careful planning. Those in the first category would be top priority. He would only add points to the second category when the threshold level had been reached. As for the third category, he planned to let it upgrade automatically.

Before this mission, Luo Yuan would have definitely added the property point to Intelligence, because during peaceful times Intelligence was more useful than anything else. It was the key to help you climb up the social ladder.

But what had happened that day had completely changed his way of thinking. The world had started to change and it would only become more dangerous in the future. Therefore, physical abilities would give him a much bigger sense of security.

Luo Yuan thought for a while before he decided to add his only property point to Dexterity.

As soon as he added the point, his body temperature suddenly increased, and then went back to normal.

He suddenly felt like the world had changed. It felt like someone had pressed the slow motion button. The sounds of insects buzzing and birds singing seemed to be longer, and there was a kind of ethereal silence. Everything seemed to move a little slower. As he was used to the effect of Dexterity upgrades, he knew that this was a phenomenon caused by accelerated nerve reflexes. That's why he was not surprised. He just needed some time to adapt.

He looked at his skill points and decided to ignore them for the time being. In order to put his knife skill to use, he would need to have a knife. However, knives were largely controlled and limited in China. Plus, he had not decided yet whether he would continue practicing this skill.

Chapter 8: The Ambiguous Message

Luo Yuan stepped aside while Zhao Qiang and Captain Chen covered their noses and rummaged the stomach with a wooden stick. They had to confirm the victims' identities. After all, they were cops and were used to seeing corpses. Shortly afterwards, the support team arrived by following the opened path. They were shocked by the image of the giant snake, but quickly calmed down when they realized that it was already dead.

Wang Fei was the first one to be carried down the hill. Before he left, he looked at Luo Yuan from afar with a confused anguished expression.

There was nothing else for Luo Yuan to do.

Several people spoke in whispers with Captain Chen and Zhao Qiang for a while. Then they put on rubber gloves, stuffed the corpses into transparent plastic bags and carried them down the hill.

Huang Jiahui had been silent for quite some time. She looked absent-minded and kept her distance from Luo Yuan. Luo Yuan wanted to talk to her at first, but quickly gave up when he saw her mood.

The way back was quite smooth, without any unexpected dangers. When they reached the police station, Luo Yuan got out of the car and changed back into his own clothes. He exchanged phone numbers with Captain Chen and asked him to contact him

when he identified the bodies. Then he left in a taxi.

When the taxi entered the city, Luo Yuan checked the time and realized it was not even 3 p.m. yet. He got off the taxi at the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) and walked inside the building.

Considering that he had been working for less than a year and that his salary was just enough to cover his basic needs, he did not have a lot of savings. However, he still had about two hundred thousand in his card after paying for his university tuition and living expenses. He had gotten that money by selling his house after his parents had been killed in an accident. He had not managed to get any compensation out of the offender.

There was an announcement stating that ICBC's fixed deposit interest rate had increased, reaching 15%. Such a high interest rate had occurred only once before, during the economic turmoil of the 90s. Luo Yuan had studied economics, so he knew that such an occurrence was unusual.

He walked to the counter. He wanted to withdraw one hundred thousand, but he was only able to withdraw fifty thousand because he had not made an appointment. He took the money and walked out of the bank, using the ATM outside to withdrew another twenty thousand.

Carrying that huge amount of money, he called a transport company and rented a small truck. Then he drove directly to a supermarket and purchased whatever he could think of. Drinking water, instant noodles, cereal, clothes, canned food, cooking oil

etc. He stopped only when the truck was completely full.

When his storage room was filled with food and groceries and more than half of his bedroom was occupied by bags of rice, he felt satisfied.

As the saying went: one will not panic while there are sufficient food supplies in the house. If the world was really about to end, he could still survive for a long period of time with that much food and drinking water, and an increased interest rate.

He turned on his computer. All the forums and news sites were mostly reporting about the rapid plant growth rate and animal mutations. Some villagers even claimed that people had been disappearing from their villages daily, spreading panic.

However, there was not much feedback on those posts. That might be because people felt numb after reading them, or because they did not believe them considering that they had not experienced anything like that before.

If it was the former, then Luo Yuan was one of them. After that incident with the snake, he did not feel like the same person anymore.

He started to search for news on the army, which usually went unnoticed, buried deep into the sea of news posts. He still managed to find some clues. The country's military bases seemed to be very busy. The reporters kept using the words "training" and "transfer".

Then he came across a 10 days-old news post from Brazil.

“Because of the climate change, exports of Brazilian wood have stopped!”

He was suddenly struck by a thought. As he continued to search for information about Brazil, he realized that it seemed to have disappeared from the news. There were no longer any news about the country, other than that piece of news that had been posted 10 days ago.

The larger part of the Amazon Rainforest, also known as the lung of the earth, was located in Brazil. Its tree cover rate was extremely high and could not even be compared to Mount Zhu, which was no more than 200m above sea level. The Amazon Rainforest was a haven for wildlife but a forbidden area for humans, because of the many strange and dangerous species living there.

Even a small hill like Mount Zhu had hid a giant snake. Considering that, things in Brazil had to be worse. No news from the country had to mean bad news.

Luo Yuan shuddered at the thought.

The sound of a door being unlocked came from outside, and Luo Yuan looked at the time. It was almost 5 p.m. It had to be Zhao Yali.

“Xiao Yuan, is Weiqiang back?”

Luo Yuan opened his door. Zhao Yali looked even more worried than she had this morning.

He didn't know whether he should tell her. The news would devastate her. The two of them had been engaged. They had bought a house together that was currently being renovated and had planned on getting married on New Year's. And now he had to tell her that he was dead, and that his body was beyond any recognition.

She would find out soon enough, but maybe he could postpone it for a little bit longer.

Luo Yuan hesitated before he said, “He should be home soon!”

Zhao Yali's face turned slightly pale as she muttered to herself, “What is he up to? Why is he not returning my phone calls? That's not like him.”

“Maybe he's stumbled onto something!” Luo Yuan suggested.

“Do you think he's having an affair?”

“He is not that kind of man. Don't overthink it. Besides, doesn't he spend all his salary on you? I'm going out for dinner,” Luo Yuan said, changing the topic.

“Let’s just eat together. I’ll cook!” Zhao Yali said politely. She felt better after talking with Luo Yuan.

“It’s alright, I shouldn’t always eat for free!” Luo Yuan said while he walked out. He felt uneasy. He did not want to keep lying to her.

The small restaurant was located at the entrance of the district. Luo Yuan was a frequent customer, so the boss was nice to him.

He had spent too much energy that day, so he ordered two extra dishes.

The phone rang when he was halfway through his meal.

Luo Yuan took it out and saw that it was Captain Chen. He could guess what it was about. He answered it.

From the other end, he heard Captain Chen’s deep voice say, “Xiao Luo, please brace yourself. I’ve got some bad news for you.” He paused, giving Luo Yuan some time to get ready, before he said, “We have the results. One of the bodies belongs to your brother-in-law. I’m sorry!”

Luo Yuan already knew this, so he wasn’t surprised. “Thank you, Captain Chen, I had actually already guessed it this afternoon. Have you contacted my sister?”

“I have already had someone from the other unit contact her. Considering the body is beyond recognition and has already begun decaying, I suggest that the family cremates it right after seeing him for the last time,” said Captain Chen.

“Okay, I will talk to her,” said Luo Yuan.

“The dead don’t rise from the grave, Xiao Luo. You have my sincere condolences. Goodbye.”

Luo Yuan hang up. He remained silent for a while. Then he quickly paid the bill and headed back home.

As soon as he opened the security door, the strong smell of something burning hit his nose.

Luo Yuan ran shocked into the kitchen. He found Zhao Yali paralyzed on the floor, a spatula in her hand, while smoke billowed out from the wok on the gas stove, making it look like it was burning.

Luo Yuan quickly turned off the gas, filled a bowl with water and poured it on the wok.

The water evaporated quickly with a soft sound.

Then he looked at Zhao Yali. She seemed stupefied and had not moved at all, even when Luo Yuan had come in. She had to be in deep sorrow.

“Do you want to die? You almost burned the house down! What happened?” Luo Yuan scolded her. He knew it would be useless to try to comfort her.

Zhao Yali stared at Luo Yuan blankly before suddenly bursting into tears. She cried in agony, making his heart throb.

“It’s alright, it’s alright!” He squatted down and patted her on the shoulder. “It’s good to cry.”

Zhao Yali hugged him and cried even harder.

“Dead... He’s dead. Weiqiang is dead... He was still alive yesterday morning... And I yelled at him...It’s my fault, it’s all my fault.”

“No, it’s not. That’s life. It wouldn’t have happened if he hadn’t gone to Gaotang,” Luo Yuan comforted her.

Chapter 9: Purchasing A Knife

Luo Yuan looked at the sleeping Zhao Yali. After she had cried herself to sleep, he had lifted her easily, carried her to her room and laid her down on the bed.

When he tried to withdraw his hands, Zhao Yali, who seemed to be having some kind of dream, hugged him tighter. Suddenly, she started talking in her sleep.

“Weiqiang, don’t go!”

Luo Yuan had no choice but to stop moving and stay in the same position.

Gradually he started feeling something, and his eyes turned involuntarily towards her legs.

Zhao Yali was wearing a dress. She had been feeling hot when she got back home, so she had taken off her tights, leaving her white plump thighs completely exposed. Luo Yuan's hands were on her thigh.

Her skin was very soft. It felt like cotton under his hands. Although Luo Yuan was not the kind of person to take advantage of somebody in a helpless situation, it was hard for someone so young to hold back when they were aroused. He felt his mouth go dry before the temptation.

He cursed silently and turned his head, refusing to look at her again. Yet her image continued to linger on his mind.

After about 10 minutes, when Zhao Yali was fast asleep and her breathing had become steadier, he withdrew his hands carefully and walked away. It felt a lot like fleeing from a battlefield.

Luo Yuan took a bath and switched on his computer to access Taobao.

He searched for the word “knife” and lots of shops came up.

Since he had returned the knife to the police station, he had felt naked. Besides, judging by that day's incident, it would be important to keep a knife at home. Not to mention that he could practice his knife skills.

Knives, especially long ones, were regulated products in the country. However, every law had its loopholes. Trading decorative knives and swords was still allowed. Their only difference from regular knives was whether they had a cutting edge or not.

Luo Yuan clicked on one of the online shops. All knives and swords were extremely expensive. The cheapest one cost more than a thousand yuan while the most expensive one could cost up to twenty thousand. Luo Yuan checked out a few more shops, but the prices were pretty much the same. He decided to go with the most popular one, and found out that they also offered customization.

Luo Yuan knew in his heart that if he had met the giant snake alone, a normal weapon like the knife he had used would definitely not have been enough as it would not have been able to break through its skin. Therefore, if he wanted to make a purchase, he would have to buy the sharpest and biggest knife he could find to ensure that he would not face any similar danger again in the near future.

He clicked open the Taobao chat box and typed, “Do you offer customization?”

Shortly thereafter, a salesman replied. He skipped all the pleasantries and asked directly, “What materials do you use and what are the specifications?”

“About 1.45m long, suitable for hacking. Do you have any preferences concerning the material?” As Luo Yuan was 1.75m tall and reached 1.76m when wearing shoes, this length was perfect for him.

“People tend to choose tool steel, high-speed steel, or H13. These are sufficient enough to fulfill basic needs. Of course there are some imported special kinds of steel too, but their prices are higher.”

“You know what I need?” Luo Yuan asked curiously when he realized what was being implied.

“It’s no secret! The number of people who purchase knives to defend themselves has been increasing, and I serve hundreds of

customers every day!”

“What do you recommend then?” Luo Yuan typed after some consideration.

“Wise choice. I recommend to use steel because it’s corrosion-resistant, and has strong durability and hardness. Many famous knives are made of this type of steel. Besides, when it gets heated, its hardness can rise up to about 60 HRC, which is enough to cut easily through iron. As the material is scarce right now, I can get only a little. That’s why the prices are higher.”

“What is the cost range?” Luo Yuan asked.

“We charge by weight. It’s ten thousand yuan per kilo of the finished product. Of course the prices are quite exaggerated, but they also keep rising daily. You may not be able to get one in the future, even if you’ve got sufficient cash.”

“Send me pictures of a sample.” Luo Yuan did not think that the salesman was trying to deceive him, but from both his tone and what had happened at Gaotang he had gathered that many people were getting themselves weapons.

The salesman was very efficient and sent him more than 10 pictures in a short amount of time. Luo Yuan took a look and chose the picture that looked like the Zhanmadao because it could be used to attack either one-handed or using both hands.

“I’d like the one in this picture. It weighs 4 kg. When can you send it to me?” It was still heavy for him based on his strength at the time, but his strength would only continue to increase.

“Your order has been finalized. You may need to wait another two to three days,” the salesman replied.

“I need it quite urgently. If you send it by tomorrow, I will pay you an extra three thousand yuan!” Luo Yuan typed quickly.

Money had the power to speed things up.

The salesman seemed to be thinking. After about 10 seconds, he typed, “Five thousand! Transfer it to my account. My account number is *****. You have to make the deposit first.”

Luo Yuan hesitated for a bit before deciding, “Okay, deal!”

It was only five thousand after all. He could afford to lose that much. The incidents that had occurred recently had made him realize that money was no longer as valuable as it used to be. He could spend as much as possible and get the good material.

The next day around 9 a.m. he walked into the Sanjiaozhou Gym.

He had not meant to go to that gym specifically. He just went there because it was the one nearest to his house and it was big enough to suit him.

His Strength had not been upgraded since his second year in university. Although he had gotten stronger, he still had not managed to meet the requirements for an upgrade. That was why he had decided to try this intense strength training to get his Strength to upgrade automatically. After he had come back from that hill, he had been feeling a sense of urgency to upgrade every one of his properties.

“Excuse me. Can I register for a monthly pass?”

“Of course you can.”

The girl at the front desk looked young. When she had seen Luo Yuan walk in, she had stood up timidly and introduced herself.

“We offer a few different passes for you to choose from. Other than a three-year pass, a one-year pass, a season pass and a monthly pass, we also offer a day pass. All these cards allow you to use the gym’s basic facilities. The monthly pass costs six hundred yuan a month, but if you register for a one-year pass, we can give you a 50% discount. No matter the type of your pass, you get a free shower and a locker. We also offer various types of training courses with professional coaches. There is yoga, free combat, dancing, swimming, etc. If you have any specific preferences, you can request a personal trainer or a masseuse, but these services are charged extra.”

Luo Yuan gave it some thought before he asked, “How much is the season pass?”

“One thousand five-hundred yuan.”

“Then I would like a season pass, please,” Luo Yuan said.

The girl nodded, took out a form and handed it to Luo Yuan. “Please fill out this form.”

“How much does it cost to hire a personal trainer?” Luo Yuan still had a lot of money in his bank account. Now was not the time to save.

“One hundred yuan per hour. You can reload your card and the fee will be deducted automatically from it,” she said, beaming at him.

“Then please help me reload it.”

After Luo Yuan had filled out the form and paid with his credit card, the girl gave him a member card. “The member card number is also your locker number. The lockers are located in the changing room.”

Luo Yuan took the member card and walked to the second floor. The area was larger than 1,000 m² and it was divided into several sections. The middle section had rows of gym facilities. It was a Saturday, which was considered peak day for businesses, so naturally the gym was very busy.

There weren't just muscular guys, white-collar men wearing tracksuits, and urban women wanting to maintain a slim figure. There were older people and kids as well.

Luo Yuan had not brought any clothes with him, so he did not go to the changing room. He headed directly to the gym area and called for an attendant.

A tall girl approached him. She was wearing white tennis clothes that left her pale legs bare and was smiling at him professionally.

"I need a personal trainer for two hours. I would prefer a professional."

"Yes, sir. We are a standard gym, so we have lots of retired or active bodybuilders working as coaches. Please wait a moment." The attendant took the card with a smile and walked away.

Shortly afterwards, a middle-aged muscular man in a singlet came over. Luo Yuan thought he was giving off a bad vibe.

"Sir, are you interested in bodybuilding?" Maybe his facial muscles were so well-developed that they made his smile rigid, but he definitely looked strong.

"Just call me Luo Yuan. Frankly, I am not interested in bodybuilding." Luo Yuan was not interested in having a muscular body. Muscles might look attractive, but they were difficult to coordinate. Sacrificing dexterity to increase strength was not

worth it. It required more than just strength for someone to know how to take a blow.

“I just want to get stronger and increase my stamina without sacrificing my dexterity. I want to achieve it in a short period of time. That’s why I need your help to create a customized intense training routine,” Luo Yuan emphasized the end of his sentence to show his determination.

“Of course, that’s my job.” The coach gave him a stiff smile before continuing, “Intense training is a process that uses science to destroy your body tissue so you can become stronger. If you haven’t warmed up yet, I would suggest the jump rope.”

The trainer had seen lots of clients like Luo Yuan, and most of them did not persist for long. Those who lasted for four or five days were considered really good compared to the ones that gave up after one day. This was because, after an intense training session, their bodies ached and tested their willpower. Today’s comfortable life made most people give up after their first try.

“I ran,” Luo Yuan said.

“For how long?” the man asked, slightly surprised.

“Half an hour,” Luo Yuan said after some consideration.

“Okay, that’s good. If you’ve already warmed up, then we can do some muscle training. First, I need to see your strength limit. Lie

down on that bench and push each time I add on weight.” The man found an empty bench press and had Luo Yuan lie down on it.

“Relax your muscles and shoulders, and take a deep breath. That’s right. I have now added 60 kg. Try to push it.”

Luo Yuan did not need to use much energy to do it.

“It’s too light.”

The man added another 5 kg on each side, but Luo Yuan still felt nothing. It wasn’t until they reached 90 kg that he started to feel like he was working out.

The test showed that his limit was 95 kg.

The trainer’s eyes widened slightly. This young man, who looked barely older than a student, was extremely strong. The trainer could only push 115 kg, and that was by using his whole body.

Luo Yuan exhaled. He was satisfied with his own strength.

His bench press record had been about 78 kg during his second year in university and his Strength was currently graded with 10 points by the system. If each added point meant a 50% Strength increase, then he would need to be able to bench press about 100 kg in order to upgrade. As it turned out, it was possible to upgrade his Strength and reach 11 points in a short period of time.

Chapter 10: Donghu Park

Luo Yuan massaged his muscles before leaving the gym. They felt a little bit swollen. He looked at the time and realized it was about noon. He decided to have lunch before leisurely walking back home.

Zhao Yali had gone out early in the morning so he hadn't gotten to see her. She must have gone to make arrangements for the funeral. As Chen Weiqiang wasn't from the area and his parents had not arrived yet, it had fallen to Zhao Yali to handle all these things.

Luo Yuan's phone rang. He saw it was one of his colleagues calling and picked it up.

"Hello, Luo yuan. Come here now. We are having a BBQ at Donghu Park. It's Xie Chao's treat. Lou Jieying is here too." It was the company secretary, Wang Xianguang. She had been hired at around the same time as Luo Yuan. She was a chaotic kind of person, and maybe that was why she got along well with everyone.

"I just had lunch, why didn't you say so earlier?" Luo Yuan said with a grin. He really did not feel like going.

"No way, you have to come. We need somebody to pick up the check when we go to karaoke later," Wang Xianguang said somberly.

"Oh, it's my wallet you miss having around. Okay, I'll take a cab

there now. You're talking about the open-air BBQ area at Donghu Park, right?" Luo Yuan said. He realized that he may not get to see his colleagues again. He was going to resign soon after all.

"Yes, same place we used to go. Hurry up, or there won't be anything left."

Luo Yuan hung up the phone, got a taxi and headed directly to Donghu Park.

Donghu Park was a well-known scenic area in the Jiangnan Province. It was the best location for dates, and recreational and fun activities. It was amazing there every season. Spring, summer, autumn, winter; it was beautiful all year long and it attracted a lot of tourists. Due to the recent climate change, Lake Donghu had become even more limpid, looking like a sapphire dropped in the middle of the park. The water lilies in the lake flowered unusually as well, making the scenery breath-taking.

It was a Saturday, so Donghu Park was crowded with people. Couples could be seen everywhere on the meadow. Luo Yuan got out of the taxi and ran towards the open air BBQ area by the lakeside.

It didn't take him long to find them.

Apparently they had just set up. Xie Chao was preparing the lamb, brushing oil skillfully on the pieces while chatting with Lou Jieying. Meanwhile, Wang Xianguang was holding an eggplant, adding some pepper on it.

Lou Jieying was in charge of the company's finances. She had fair skin, an oval-shaped face, and large eyes. She was one of the most beautiful women in the company. However, she was a bit arrogant. She had a good relationship with her female co-workers, but she was cold to all the men.

Luo Yuan did not hang out with her much, and he did not know how Xie Chao had managed to get her to join them.

"I should have come later. This is tempting me," Luo Yuan said when as he walked up to them.

Wang Xianguang had a plump face with high eyebrows. Her cheeks dimpled whenever she smiled, which made her look cute. Although he had not inquired about her family background, she had to be well off judging by her outfit. When she saw Luo Yuan, her slightly wrinkled eyebrows straightened and she grinned, "I didn't invite you here. All I needed was your wallet."

"That's the reality of our money-hungry society. It's so dark. I should eat more. Maybe I'll stuff myself to death!"

Xie Chao and Luo Yuan both worked in the marketing department. Though he was familiar with the man, they were not that close. He greeted Xie Chao and Lou Jieying, and made some polite small talk before taking a chicken wing and putting it on the barbecue rack.

"Why didn't you come to work yesterday?" Wang Xianguang

asked.

“It’s a long story. I almost died.” Luo Yuan sighed, thinking of what had happened the previous day.

“You’re lying.” Wang Xianguang raised her eyebrows. She obviously did not believe him.

Luo Yuan was relatively close to her and they always had fun together. When he realized that she was oblivious to everything that had been going on, he wanted to warn her.

“Would you believe me if I said that I met a giant snake yesterday?”

“You mean in a dream, right? I’m not stupid,” Wang Xianguang said sullenly. She knew that she was not that smart, but she didn’t like it when people made fun on her.

Luo Yuan opened his mouth slightly. He was speechless.

Xie Chao interrupted them, “Where did you see it?”

Luo Yuan spread some oil on his chicken wing before saying, “On Mount Zhu in Gaotang. My roommate had been missing, so I went to Mount Zhu with a few cops from Gaotang and we came across a giant snake.”

“How large was it?”

“About as thick as a bucket!” Luo Yuan said.

Xie Chao grinned. He did not look like he believed him either. “There’s been similar news all over the internet recently. Apparently plants and animals have been growing like crazy. Could it be that it was as thick as a human thigh, and not as thick as a bucket? You must have been mistaken.”

After Xie Chao had expressed his opinion, he turned to Lou Jieying and said, “Do you like it spicy?”

“Yes, but not too much,” Lou Jieying said, glancing at Luo Yuan.

Luo Yuan looked crestfallen. Maybe the fact that people were reading too much peculiar information on a daily basis made them disbelieving.

“Is it true?” Wang Xianguang asked timidly. Girls usually tended to be afraid of snakes.

Luo Yuan patiently said, “Why would I lie? The situation may get worse. Look at the plants around here. They are being trimmed quite often. If you go to a more rural area, you won’t believe your eyes.”

“I believe you,” Luo Jieying said suddenly. She looked worried. She hesitated a little before adding, “I have an uncle who works for

the police. A lot of beggars have been going missing lately. They get eaten by rats coming from the drains.”

Xie Chao was stunned. “Rats are eating humans?” he asked incredulously,

Lou Jieying did not answer. She seemed reluctant.

Luo Yuan wasn’t sure how to feel. On one hand, he had finally confirmed his hypothesis. On the other, he was afraid what the future might hold.

Suddenly, someone screamed in terror in the distance. There was a big commotion. People were crying out and screaming, many of them running desperately in that direction.

“What’s happening?” Luo Yuan’s face darkened as he turned towards the lake. He saw the lake water billow near the shore and the deep red color of blood gush up to the surface.

A long line suddenly appeared on the surface of the lake, piercing it like a sharp sword. The water line moved fast, reaching the point where the water was blood red in just a few seconds.

Whirlpools kept forming on the water, one after the other. Each of them was about one meter wide and half a meter deep. Some collided with each other, either disappearing or forming a larger whirlpool.

The crowd ran around wildly for a while before it realized that the monster in the lake could not come out of water. Then everybody just stood there and watched. Some people were looking for the cause while more people started joining them after hearing the commotion.

The news were spreading fast.

A couple had died. They had been making out by the lakeside. It was too hot, so they had taken their shoes off and dipped their feet in the cool water. Nobody had noticed when exactly the ripples on the lake surface had first appeared.

A black peculiar fish had suddenly jumped out of the water and pulled the man under. As they had been hugging at the time, the woman was dragged under the surface too. The two of them had died together.

The cops came to the park quickly following the tragedy, and the site was soon closed off.

Some of the cops did not seem surprised. When they were told what had happened, they immediately contacted their superior.

“I think we can’t stay here any longer. Let’s go,” Lou Jieying said. Her palms were clenched and she looked very pale. The tragedy must have shocked her.

“Okay!” Xie Chao suddenly turned and asked Luo Yuan, “You

were telling the truth about that snake?”

Luo Yuan nodded grimly before he said, “I’ve decided to quit. You should get ready too. Things might get worse than you can imagine.”

As they were walking out of the park, a few police cars pulled up. Donghu Park would need to close for a few days to ensure that all weird fish in the lake were killed.

They had reached the junction when Luo Yuan asked, “Are we still going to sing karaoke?”

“You guys go ahead. I’m no longer in the mood. I’ll just head home.” Lou Jieying said as she shook her head.

“I am not going either.” Xie Chao had lost his interest too when he saw that Lou Jieying would not be going.

“You said you’re going quit. Can I have your number?” Lou Jieying asked, looking at Luo Yuan.

Luo Yuan was slightly bewildered but quickly said, “Of course.”

“Keep in touch!” Luo Jieying beamed while she shook her smartphone. “I’m going home.”

“I’ll take you!” Xie Chao offered.

“No, it’s alright. I’ll just take a taxi,” Lou Jieying declined, shaking her head.

After they had exchanged numbers, Luo Yuan put his phone back in his pocket and looked at Wang Xiaguang who was still staring blankly into space. “Why are you still in shock? You’re not scared, are you?”

“What happened was awful! Why aren’t you reacting at all?” Wang Xiaguang said, looking at him oddly.

“Men tend to be braver,” Luo Yuan said lightly. Compared to what had happened the previous day, what had just happened felt like nothing. That’s why he wasn’t afraid.

“Xie Chao is not. I think he’s quite terrified.” Wang Xiaguang refuted.

“Are you looking for excuses?” Luo Yuan did not want to gossip, so he decided to switch the topic, “It seems that nobody wants to go. Are we still going?”

“Of course we are. Why wouldn’t we be going?” Wang Xiaguang said loudly.

“Just the two of us?” Luo Yuan was slightly confused.

“What, two people can’t sing together?” Wang Xiaguang retorted while she glared at him.

“Okay. You just have to make me spend money, don’t you?” Luo Yuan could not help but say.

The two of them talked while they walked toward the nearest KTV.

“You said you went to Mount Zhu yesterday. Did you find your roommate after all?” Wang Xiaguang asked curiously.

“He was dead. I’m not going to tell you how. It would give you nightmares,” Luo Yuan said with a sigh.

“Don’t tell me he had been swallowed by that snake!” Wang Xiaguang said while she widened her eyes.

“I didn’t say anything.” Luo Yuan said innocently.

“Your face did, though. If I have nightmares tonight, it’ll be your fault.” Wang Xiaguang scolded him.

“Reality is more dreadful. At least nightmares you can wake up from. I’ll give you a piece of advice. When you get back home, buy lots of food and groceries. The more, the better. I’m worried that things will get worse,” Luo Yuan said.

“Actually, my dad has already bought a lot. He’s even built a basement. At first I thought he was overreacting. After all, he does have a record. He spent a lot of money on building a ship with his friends prior to the prophecy of the world ending in 2012. That had made us all laugh for quite some time,” Wang Xianguang murmured.

“If something really bad happened, you could come to my house.” Wang Xianguang murmured, lowering her head as she blushed.

Luo Yuan was taken aback. He looked at Wang Xianguang silently for a while before he said, “Thank you. If I need shelter, I will look for you.”

They remained silent the rest of the way, both deep in their own thoughts.

Chapter 11: Snake Skin Bulletproof Vest

At the end, they decided to cancel their KTV plans. Wang Xianguang's mother had called and it had sounded urgent, so Wang Xianguang decided to return home, even though she didn't want to. Zhao Yali did not come home that evening. Luo Yuan switched on his desktop computer to play a game, but then decided against it. He could not calm himself down. He felt depressed and he knew something was bothering him, which made him want to scream bad. He kept scratching his head in frustration. In the end, he walked to the living room and started shadow boxing. He had only four points in his close combat skills. However, his ability to attack became very powerful when he combined his 12-point Dexterity with his combat skills.

His movements produced several sounds as he fought against the air. He could injure someone severely by hitting them, and might even kill them if he struck their vital points. Initially, his shadowbox was meant to provide stress relief, and every single one of his attack moves was a violent one. However, eventually, he had gotten addicted to it and slowly discovered the joys of boxing. He felt pumped and excited. "Beep. After a sufficient training period, your Free Combat skills have improved. One point for Free Combat." He had been so into it that he hadn't realized there had been a skill upgrade. He had been practicing for almost an hour. When he stopped, there was a puddle of sweat on the floor and his shirt was completely drenched. He felt his blood boiling and circulating fast. He enjoyed the feeling.

It was the first time that he had had such a long training. He had not expected it to be so addictive. He felt better compared to how he had felt before shadowboxing, and he headed straight to the bathroom to take a shower. He could not predict any future

turmoil. The only thing he could control was himself, and he had to keep improving if he wanted to be ready to face any future challenges. Be it the stone age or the 21st century, capabilities were always the key to survival. It was only the level of cruelty that varied. The reason he had undergone so much training in the past was to get strong, and that hadn't changed.

The next morning, Captain Chen gave him a call to tell him to come and collect the snake skin right after breakfast. He immediately called a cab and headed to Gaotang. He walked into the restaurant where Captain Chen and Zhao Qiang were having tea.

"Hi, Captain. Hi, Zhao Qiang. There you both are!" Luo Yuan greeted them, smiling.

The two of them just watched him without saying anything. Luo Yuan felt uncomfortable. He smiled awkwardly while he asked, "What's wrong with you? Why are you looking at me like that?"

Captain Chen coughed once and stared at him seriously.

Luo Yuan got panicked. He thought he might be involved in a criminal case. However, the only fight he had had recently was the one with Wang Fei. What if Wang Fei was dead? He rejected that thought because if that were the case, then he would be meeting them at the police station, not at a restaurant.

He decided to just ask them directly, "Did something happen?"

Captain Chen tapped the table with his finger and replied slowly, "No, nothing happened. But we have some questions for you, and you better tell us the truth."

"What is the relationship between you and Chen Weiqiang? What you told us before does not match my investigation report. I believe you know us both well enough. It's your call whether to tell the truth or keep lying," he tried to intimidate him indirectly.

Luo Yuan was trying to figure out what the best plan would be while he listened to the Captain.

He knew he could not hide it any longer, so he replied with a grin, "I see his girlfriend as a sister, so it makes sense to treat Chen Weiqiang as a brother-in-law, doesn't it? Besides, it was just a spur-of-the-moment idea during a stressful time. Is it really so bad to be passionate and helpful?"

Zhao Qiang laughed before saying, "Of course not! However, you seemed to be too passionate, which seems suspicious, if you ask me."

Luo Yuan carefully answered, "Is this an occupational disease? I know you meet a lot of bad people in your line of work, but it's unfair to question a good person. Don't you agree?"

Zhao Qiang tried to pry by asking, "Oh, really? Do you have a crush on that woman? I think so, otherwise you wouldn't be so passionate about her. I heard that the two of you are living together. Is it true?"

They had met all the family members of the victims, and Zhao Yali had been the most impressive one. They had only found out that she was not his sister after talking with her. Captain Chen and Zhao Qiang had decided to tease Luo Yuan to get back at him.

"I'm not that kind of person." Luo Yuan was speechless. Although he did like her, he would never have done that to Chen Weiqiang.

"Hey, enough. We've got more important matters to discuss," Captain Chen interrupted Zhao Qiang. "Here's the deal, Luo Yuan. Would you like to join the police? We're talking about an official officer role, which is different than working in federal defense," Captain Chen told him.

"An officer? I thought that required specific qualifications," Luo Yuan said uncertainly.

"That's how it used to be. However, ever since we reported the snake incident, the Chief Minister has been paying close attention to this issue, and he issued a memorandum to recruit more policemen. That's why I wanted to check with you."

Captain Chen had been impressed by Luo Yuan's performance. Most importantly, he admired his character. Luo Yuan had saved his life, and he had also been willing to sacrifice himself for his friend.

"What's happening? Is the situation getting worse?" Luo Yuan did

not agree right away. He was too shocked.

"I don't want to hide the truth from you. You will find out eventually. We are facing a workforce shortage in almost all levels, but especially in the villages. There are too many criminals and people just keep going missing. I also heard that the government is going to burn down the forest once they have enough manpower," Captain Chen said, looking very serious.

In fact, the police force was not the only department in need of new recruits. The city armed force had to do the same thing. All weapons had to be regularized and several tons of them had been shipped to the city. This news could not be disclosed to the public if they wanted to avoid chaos.

Luo Yuan hesitated. He had never wanted to be a cop. Besides, the risk of being a policeman was a lot higher than it used to be. He could get killed anytime. However, it was difficult to predict the future. No place was 100% safe anymore. If the villages had become so dangerous so fast, then the danger would soon spread to the city as well.

"I need to think about it," Luo Yuan told Captain Chen after some consideration.

"Alright, I understand," Captain Chen agreed, nodding his head. Since the day they had come back from the forest, several policemen had left on medical leave and two had handed in their resignations. Wang Fei had been one of those two.

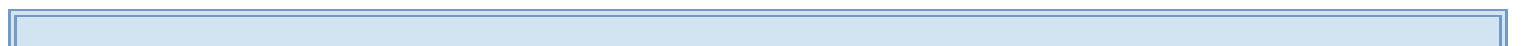
“Oh, here you go!” Captain Chen seemed to remember something. He passed a parcel to Luo Yuan with a smile and said, “Your eyes were very sharp. I was so sad to go back to the office and find this. All the snakeskin has been used to make bulletproof jackets. There are eight pieces in total and the Chief Officer treasures them all. I’ve been asking to have them for quite a long time, but he only gave me one,” Captain Chen told Luo Yuan. “It’s made of four layers of snakeskin, and it’s stronger and lighter than any normal bulletproof jacket. To be honest, I felt like keeping it for myself,” he explained sadly.

“Oh dear! It’s done,” Luo Yuan said happily as he took it into his hands and touched it. It was so light, [it barely weighed 250 grams](#).

斤 (catty) is one of the unit measurements of weight in China, Taiwan, Peninsular of North Korea, Vietnam, Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore, and Malaysia. It was commonly used amongst the Chinese community but kilograms is getting popular in the modern society. A catty is approximately 500 grams in China and Taiwan, while it is approximately 600 grams in Vietnam, Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore, and Malaysia. Therefore, half a catty is about 250 grams in China.

He opened the parcel and held the bulletproof jacket in his hands. It was a vest with a few snake scales attached to the front with superglue. It felt so smooth and shiny when he touched it. It was like artwork. Its only imperfection was its hard material. However, it was still considered a good piece compared to the heavy bulletproof jackets made of iron plates.

Luo Yuan secretly used his superpower to analyze the vest.



"Snake Skin Bulletproof Vest."

"Materials: Snakeskin."

"Rarity: Light Blue Color."

"Weight: 0.2kg."

"Protection: 14-18."

"Secondary Functions: Protection against certain animals (Weak)."

"Equipment Requirements: None."

"Comments: This is a good bulletproof vest, perfect for preventing bullet and knife penetration. Since it is made from rat snake skin, it could protect you against rats, frogs, and birds. Then again, it could also make them more aggressive."

"Oh! It's a light blue piece of equipment!" Luo Yuan was so happy and excited.

Most objects were grey, and very few of them were white. Only pieces of really sophisticated technology and equipment were a light blue, blue, or dark blue color. For example, his mobile phone was blue while normal phones tended to be light blue. The more

advanced the object, the darker its color would be. But when it came to a bulletproof jacket or something similar that had nothing to do with technology, it was very difficult to get such a good rating.

"What do you think? Not bad, right?" Captain Chen asked with a smile.

"Indeed! Thank you so much. Although I still need some time to consider your offer, please don't hesitate to contact me if you need any help," Luo Yuan said as he kept on smiling. He felt safer now that he had the vest.

"Oh, thanks! I wouldn't want to experience that kind of adventure again, though!" Zhao Qiang quickly said.

They continued to chit chat for a while until Luo Yuan got up to leave.

Luo Yuan saw many harvesters by the roadside on his way home. He did not understand why until he recalled what Captain Chen had told him. Apparently, the governors in Gaotang had decided to burn the farmland and the weeds in order to prevent disaster. Nobody could predict the effectiveness of those measures, but the aggressiveness of the government was telling. The world seemed indeed to be coming to an end.

Chapter 12: Deterioration

"Good evening, my fellow audience. You are now watching the news on CCTV. The President has urged citizens to remain calm during his speech following the inspection of the Nanjing Military Base. He expressed his hope that citizens will stay united to help stabilize society, and his belief that the government and army will be able to diffuse the situation... The President claimed that reinforcements of both the Chinese and American military, as well as improvements in the technology and trading industry, are beneficial to both countries during his meeting with the Vice President of the United States in Southern China. The Vice President of the United States stated that the relationship between China and America is vital to the world's development, and that the US is willing to cooperate with China towards a mutual goal...

The Yunnan Military Base is currently conducting a series of weapon and bomb training sessions, as well as examining the power of its heavy-lift launching vehicle... In other news, the northern lights phenomena in the North-Eastern region has attracted a lot of people..."

Luo Yuan was focused on the news, trying to analyze the current state of the globe. The tenants above his apartment were quarreling again.

"All you do is eat! We are going to die soon if you can't get any food by tomorrow!" the female tenant yelled loudly.

"What am I supposed to do? Everything is out of stock at the supermarket, the wet market, even the wholesale market. I'll try

again tomorrow, alright?" The male tenant replied with a sigh.

"All I do is wait! How much longer do we have to wait? We are running out of food soon! I told you so many times to go grocery shopping earlier, but you refused to listen. You told me that you couldn't get your leave approved. And now what? Your company has shut down!" Her voice could penetrate the walls.

"Why didn't you go grocery shopping? Why do you always stay at home?" the guy was now raising his voice as well.

"You think I like staying at home? Who the hell is going to take care of the kids, though? Or am I supposed to bring them along to the supermarket? Are you insane? Do you know how dangerous it is out there? There are crimes happening every day!"

Smash!

The sound of glass breaking and children crying reached his ears.

"Alright, alright! I'll get some from my friends tomorrow. Things will be fine sooner or later. There is lots of food reserved in the National Granary. The government won't just let us die," he lowered his voice, trying to comfort his wife.

"You're driving me crazy! Why did I marry you in the first place? We are running out of food and you don't even seem concerned! How are we going to survive the coming days?" the wife cried while she kept on shouting.

"Fine! I'll go to the black market! I'll get food no matter the cost, are you satisfied now? Just stop shouting, it's beyond embarrassing!"

Their voices got gradually softer.

There had been so many changes during the past two weeks. Both the news and the internet had been reporting the same things, causing major panic in the public. No matter how aggressively the government tried to urge citizens to calm down, it was proving ineffective. In fact, things kept getting worse every day. Many resources ran out of stock, especially food, and everything was getting more expensive. As a result, there were crimes happening everyday. Robbery, rape, and murder had become a common occurrence. Luo Yuan was not affected, because he had been well-prepared for this situation.

"Hey, Yuan! Let's have dinner!" Zhao Yali called, coming out from the kitchen.

Luo Yuan switched off the TV and sat down at the table. She had come back 10 days ago. It was sad that she had to go through this ordeal before she could even recover from the pain of losing her fiancé.

Zhao Yali looked cautious while she was eating. After a while, she started to speak, "I went to the wet market again today, but I still couldn't get anything."

Luo Yuan responded, “I think it’d best to just stay at home for a while. Things will get better. I don’t think the government would neglect something like this. They will do something to help soon.”

“What about your company?” she asked.

“I have no idea. Everyone is worried. No one can get any work done. I don’t know how long this can go on for,” Luo Yuan replied.

Zhao Yali looked depressed and said, “I’m planning to move back to my hometown. I’m worried about my parents.”

Luo Yuan was not surprised. Zhao Yali had been calling her parents a lot lately and always looked bothered. “When are you leaving?” he asked.

“I think the day after tomorrow. My house is located in a village in the outskirts. I’ve heard that it’s very dangerous there, so I need to go back,” she told him, expressing her worry.

Suddenly Luo Yuan’s phone rang. “Beep!” The system had sent him a message. It read, “Optional F+ Level Mission: Make sure Zhao Yali gets back to her hometown safely. Mission fails if she dies.” “No deadline. (Accept/Decline)” Oh no! Another F+ Level Mission?

One of his hands went stiff.

“Are you alright? You look sick,” Zhao Yali said gently.

“Oh, I’m fine. When are you leaving again?” he quickly asked her in an effort to distract her.

“The day after tomorrow. I’ve booked a train ticket,” Zhao Yali repeated. She added, “You can keep everything in this house. Don’t be a stranger!”

She looked happier at the thought of returning to her hometown. Luo Yuan felt uneasy looking at her smile. Zhao Yali would probably die if he declined the mission. He could not put her in such danger. He was silent for a while before he said, “Since you’re so generous, how about I accompany you there?”

“That’d be great, I have lots of things to carry though, so don’t complain later.”

Zhao Yali did not reject his offer because she thought that Luo Yuan would just accompany her to the train station. Plus, she would be gone forever and wouldn’t be coming back to Donghu City anymore. Even though she had been throwing lots of things away, there was still quite a lot to carry, and she had even considered shipping it back to her hometown.

“I think you misunderstood. I meant I’ll be accompanying you back to your hometown. It’s very dangerous in the villages. It’s too risky for you to go there alone,” Luo Yuan said in a serious tone.

“Oh! I’ll be fine, don’t worry. It’s not that far away. It’s just an hour’s journey by train,” Zhao Yali said. She had looked surprised

for a second.

"Alright, here's the deal. I'm not letting you go back alone. I'm going to book a ticket online right now. What's the destination and departure time?" he asked.

"Yushui City, 1.30p.m.," Zhao Yali answered.

She knew that Luo Yuan would insist on following her. She was not an opinionated person, plus, all the bad news she had heard on TV and read on websites had made her really worried. However, at the same time, she was facing a dilemma. She did not know how to explain to her parents who Luo Yuan was. She was not sure what people would think of her considering her fiancé had just passed away.

Luo Yuan suddenly asked her, "Is it possible to leave tomorrow?"

"Actually, you don't have to come with me. I really don't want to trouble you. I also wanted to go back tomorrow initially, but there weren't any tickets. There are lots of working foreigners going back to their hometown as well. It's very difficult to get one."

He waved his hand before saying, "I've resigned already, so my schedule is wide open. Just need to book a ticket." He walked to his room, logged onto the railway service website, and booked it.

Luo Yuan returned to his bedroom after dinner. He took out a long wooden box and removed the lid. There was a [Zhanmadao](#)

lying inside it in a sheath. There were special designs engraved on it. Luo Yuan held the handle while he slowly pulled the sword out from the sheath. Its body was flat and its blade was very thin. The tip was curved but sharp, which made it look scary. It was strong enough to break through any normal metal with just a single strike.

[Zhanmadao](#) is a single long broad-bladed sword with a long handle suitable for two-handed use. Dating to 1072, it was used as an anti-cavalry weapon.

“Zhanmadao.”

"Materials: 165cm of alloy."

"Rarity: Light Blue."

"Weight: 4.1kg"

"Power: 16-20."

"Secondary Functions: Attacking Speed +1."

"Equipment Requirements: Strength 11-points."

"Note: This is a modern Zhanmadao. It can break through most materials, including metal."

Historically, the Zhanmadao had existed since the Han Dynasty and it was similar to a [Modao](#), a sword that could to kill a horse as easily as it could kill a man. It was a famous weapon in the military battlefield, popular among frontline generals and knights. Apparently, the modern version was different from the ancient one, though. The handle of the modern Madao was shorter and easier to hold using one or both hands, and its body was shorter, reaching an ideal length that added strength to the sword.

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Although Luo Yuan's strength was still below 11-points, even after a period of intensive training, he could still use it well. His only concern was his high energy consumption.

He played around with the sword, swinging it in the air a few times. As this type of sword was very heavy, the gravitational force pulled it forward, making it easier for him to handle it. A normal person without any basic skills or knowledge couldn't have pulled this off. It was not a big deal for Luo Yuan, though.

He was skilled at using the sword, and his every strike seemed effortless yet impactful in the battlefield. He practiced with the sword in his bedroom, stopping after half an hour. Then he took out a leather cloth and wiped away any unseen dust particles on

the sword before sliding it back inside the sheath.

“Although F+ Level Missions are always dangerous, my strengths and skills have improved since my last mission. I got a new attribute point and there are five more points which I haven’t allocated yet. If I allocate all my attributes on knife skills, I think I’ll succeed. I have just the weapon for it!”

Chapter 13: Purchasing Limit

Luo Yuan was awakened by the horn of an advertising car. It was early morning and the sun hadn't even risen in the horizon yet.

"My dearest citizens! There will be a specific quantity of food and water available to you for purchase in order to maintain harmony and suppress the price of goods. The city council committee has set up a few supply counters in a mega wet market, and all citizens are welcome to make purchases by showing their identity card. I repeat, It is only a limited supply."

"My dearest citizens! My dearest citizens!" The loudspeakers kept playing the same thing over and over until his sleepiness had all but disappeared. He got up, put on his clothes and opened the door.

"What's happening outside?" Zhao Yali asked with a yawn as she walked out of her bedroom in her pajamas.

"The government has taken some action. We can get a specific quantity of food and water," Luo Yuan replied happily. Although he had stored some dry food, he could not find any fresh vegetables or meat. They were always out of stock. Besides, sooner or later that food would run out too. However, they didn't need to be worried anymore. That was definitely good news. After all, nobody liked turmoil except for careerists and madmen.

"Let me check it out and see whether we can get some," Luo Yuan said.

"Let's go together. Maybe we could get double the amount?" Zhao Yali suggested.

"Sounds like a good idea! You go and change, we should go as soon as possible. I think you don't need to brush your teeth first," Luo Yuan reminded her.

"Oh no!" Only then did Zhao realize that she was still wearing her pajamas. Her face turned red. She quickly closed the door and went to change. It was 10 minutes later that she came out of her room again. She seemed to have put on some light makeup. Luo Yuan felt uneasy while they left the house together. He was shocked to see what was happening outside.

The district was extremely crowded. He had never realized there were so many residents in the area. All those people seemed to be attracted by something and the human queues they formed had eventually caused traffic. Those who owned a private car wouldn't stop honking as they got stuck in the human traffic. Some of them got out of their cars because they had not been moving at all. People had brought their shopping and laundry baskets along, some had even brought their luggage bags. However, most of them had gone with bare hands, just like Luo Yuan had. When they reached the main street, they realized that what they had seen earlier was nothing compared to the crowd in front of them. The streets were full of people and the traffic had gotten worse. Both of them squeezed through the crowd, not really having to make any effort as people kept pushing them forward. This was something beyond Luo Yuan's imagination. He usually only saw such phenomena on TV.

“Wow! This is really happening, huh?” Zhao Yali looked excited to see all that crowd. She said, “I used to think that people in this city were cold to each other, and that made people feel lonely. I can’t believe this is happening. It’s like what my mother used to tell me.”

Luo Yuan shook his head, not really understanding her. “We shall see,” he replied, “I wouldn’t have come here if I knew there’d be this many people. I have no idea how long we are going to have to wait in line.” He was already regretting it.

“Perhaps it is because I’m leaving soon. I always thought that I would spend the rest of my life in this city, that I would get married and have kids. And yet I’m leaving.” She looked depressed and she had tears in her eyes.

“Hey, you have to leave those sad things behind. Actually, the villages are not safe to stay in anymore. Why don’t you convince your parents to move to the city? There are many mutated animals there. They would be safer if they moved here,” Luo Yuan suggested, trying to comfort her.

“Okay. Anyway, I really want to thank you. I wouldn’t have been able to go on with my life without your support,” Zhao Yali told him sincerely.

“I didn’t do anything. You’re being too kind. Are you forgetting that we have been housemates for a long time?” Luo Yuan said.

“Anyway, please keep in touch,” Zhao Yali said seriously.

“Oh, It’s not the end of the world. I’ll be accompanying you tomorrow. You can thank me when you get home,” Luo Yuan interrupted her. Finally, they arrived at the nearest mega wet market for food supplies.

There were two lines of fully-armed policemen standing there holding automatic rifles. Their job was to control the situation and maintain the order. Their deterrence caused some minor uproar among the crowd, but the situation was eventually stabilized. Luo Yuan and Zhao Yali run into the wet market, following the flow of the crowd. Many facilities had been removed from the market and replaced by huge bulks of food supplies. There was a yellow string set up around the guarded zone, and policemen were standing at a one-meter radius from the trading counters. Although there were approximately 400 to 500 counters, the queues still moved very slowly. It was hot and the humidity was high. Both of them were sweating in 10 minutes. Luo Yuan felt fine as he had been physically strong and fit ever since he had gotten the superpower, and he recovered from illness and injuries faster than the average person. Zhao Yali was weaker, though, and she would probably suffer a heat stroke before they could even reach the counter.

“How about we go up front and try to squeeze in?” Luo Yuan suggested.

“I don’t think that will work,” Zhao Yali said while she fanned herself with her hands.

“Let’s try. Just hold my hand,” Luo Yuan said.

Luo Yuan did not wait for her to respond. He just grabbed her hand and squeezed through the crowd. He was very strong, his strength being 1.5 times greater than a normal person's. They both moved between the gaps of the crowd, hearing some complaints around them. However, they were not only people to do that. It was something very common for Chinese people. In fact, most working adults did that every day when they took the train or bus to work. After a while, they reached counter 1.

"Why do I only get this much? It's much less than what the others are getting!" an old lady was saying.

"Because you're not from the area. Please check the notice on the board outside," the young woman at the counter replied impatiently. "Please make way for the next person. Next!"

The old lady was pushed away by the crowd.

"I want everything. Give me the biggest portion," a bald guy with a big golden necklace said, shaking a stack of cash.

"Each person can only purchase supplies for three days using their identity card. You can only come back again after three days."

"Can't you make a special arrangement? I have more than enough money," the bald guy asked in a disrespectful way.

“I’m sorry, I can’t do that. That’s the policy. Total CNY 200, please!” the employee said after explaining.

“Looks like I can only buy food from the black market then,” the bald guy murmured to himself while he paid and took his groceries.

Finally, Luo Yuan came up to the cashier. He passed her his identity card along with CNY 200.

The cashier asked him, "Three days right?" Then she went on to record all the particulars on her computer while another staff member handed Luo Yuan the groceries. They purchased them and quickly got out away the crowd.

"Gosh, how hot it was in there!" Zhao Yali said while she let go of Luo Yuan’s arm and looked back at the crowd. “Let’s see what’s inside the bag.”

“A 2.5 kg bag of white rice, 500 grams of meat, 1 kg of vegetables, three apples, and 2.5 litres of drinking water. Oh, plus three pieces of chocolate and a small packet of milk and sugar,” Luo Yuan said after checking.

Zhao Yali seemed shocked. "That was way too much money that we paid for these little things. They used to cost just CNY 50. The value of money is depreciating!"

"This is considered cheap these days. What did you expect? At

any rate, it's a lot cheaper than the black market," Luo Yuan told her.

He knew that dry food in the black market cost about CNY 25 per 500 grams, and meat was sold for CNY 100 per 500 grams. Therefore, CNY 200 for those things they had just bought from the counter was cheap in comparison.

"Those are supplied by the government, though. How can they still be so expensive? Are they crazy? Ugh, thank God I'm leaving soon, otherwise I don't think I would be able to survive in this city," she said angrily. She used to work in a foreign investment company and her salary had been below CNY 3000. She wouldn't have been able to survive even if her company had not shut down.

"It's true!" Luo Yuan said with a smile.

Actually, the villages did not seem to be better off than the city. Captain Chen from the police station in Gaotang had given Luo Yuan a call a few days ago to remind him to store some food for emergency. He had not said much, but Luo Yuan could sense how critical the situation was, and he had decided to go check on it. When he had arrived in Gaotang, everything had seemed fine and stable. The government had burned most of the farmland and removed lots of big trees. However, when he had come to a small junction, he'd realized that the new crops in the paddy field weren't growing in this warm unusual December temperature. In fact, he saw weeds growing lusher and higher than those young paddies. Those weeds had occupied all the spaces between the paddy, preventing the paddy from absorbing sunlight for photosynthesis.

An old farmer told him that those weeds were hard to get rid of by using pesticides, and the only other way of removing them was by pulling them out. However, there were too many poisonous snakes in the paddy field now, and no one was brave enough to do it. Luo Yuan was shocked by the situation in the village. He could not even remember returning home. All he knew was that the world was about to change.

The next afternoon, Luo Yuan and Zhao Yali were ready to leave. Luo Yuan carried out two pieces of luggage and called a cab to drive them to the train station.

"Why are you carrying that wooden box?" Zhao Yali asked, looking at the box in his hands.

"Oh, it's a piece of art," Luo Yuan replied with a smile.

"Actually, you don't need to buy anything for my parents. They might get the wrong idea," she said helplessly. Apparently, she had misunderstood Luo Yuan. If he brought a gift along, she knew that her parents would not believe any explanation she gave them.

"You are the one who got the wrong idea. This is not a gift. I forgot to buy a gift. We can buy something from the train station!" he said with a smile.

"Please don't. I'll never hear the end of it," she rushed to stop him.

"Are you going home to see your parents? What about rice? I'm sure your future mother-in-law will like it," the cab driver joined in the conversation for fun.

Zhao Yali's cheeks turned pink.

"Actually we're just friends. That's why she was concerned," Luo Yuan explained when he saw the color on her cheeks.

"Oh, I see. My wife and I were like this as well, and we got married in the end. Anyway, where are you guys heading to? I mean, what's your final destination?" the driver asked.

"Yushui City!" Luo Yuan said loudly. He was a bit mad.

"Is there a place there called Yushan?" the driver asked suddenly.

"Yes! Yushan is located in the northern region of Yushui City. It's a famous tourist attraction. Have you been there?" Zhao Yali asked the driver. She seemed excited to be talking about her hometown.

"Hmmm, I haven't actually, but I've heard from my friend that many people have died in the village recently. Even armored cars came and bombed the place for a day," the driver said seriously.

Zhao Yali looked frightened.

Luo Yuan tapped her shoulder to comfort her before he asked the driver, "Is it that serious? How reliable is your source?"

"I wouldn't joke about something like this. I'd get nothing out of it anyway. My buddies are from Yushui City, but they work in Donghu City. They got their parents to move here because Donghu City seems to be safer. Everywhere else you go there's mess and chaos," the driver said.

"How long ago did you hear about this?" Luo Yuan went on to ask.

"About three days ago. It should be fine by now. Anyway, you can never be too careful," the driver explained.

"Thank you. It's lucky that you told us. We really appreciate it," Luo Yuan quickly thanked the driver.

"Don't mention it. Everyone is having a hard time. It feels like the end of the world is coming, and the government is still being strict with us. If you ask me, everyone should be given a gun for self-defense," the driver complained.

"Yuan, what should I do? I'm worried about my parents," Zhao Yali said anxiously.

"I thought you just called them last night. Perhaps you could call them again?" Luo Yuan suggested.

"Yes, yes." She quickly took out her phone and dialed.

"Hi, mom! Are you and dad alright? Oh, nothing special, just checking. I'm taking the train at 1.30 p.m. I should be there by 4 p.m. I have a colleague coming along. It's a guy, but it's not what you're thinking. Oh, mom, did something happen in Yushui City? A rodent attack? Alright then, I'm hanging up." Zhao Yali hung up the phone, looking relieved. "They are both safe. Seems like there was a rodent attack. That's nothing, right?" Zhao Yali asked.

"Just rodents?" Luo Yuan thought silently. He had a bad instinct. He knew an F+ Level Mission would not be that easy to handle.

The two of them arrived at the train station but the Zhanmadao was not allowed past the checkpoint. Luo Yuan needed to arrange for an express shipment and make sure that it arrived at the same time that they would. He was not confident that he could complete the mission without the knife. The train station was very crowded as Chinese New Year season was approaching. Everyone looked depressed and anxious about the future. Zhao Yali and Luo Yuan stood aside and waited because they could not find a seat. Luo Yuan realized that a lot of trains were delayed at the same time. The train going to Yushui City got delayed as well when it was around 1.30 p.m. It seemed like something had happened to the trains on the way to the station.

"Our train got delayed too. That's not punctual at all," Zhao Yali complained.

"It's alright. What's important is that we get to our destination," Luo Yuan comforted her.

Fortunately, there had been no accident, and the train arrived after 30 minutes.

Luo Yuan validated his ticket and entered the platform. Everyone around him looked shocked. Some people were even shouting. The exterior of the train was covered in blood and there were also feathers in some places. Luo Yuan bent down and picked up a gray feather. He used his superpower to identify it.

"A feather from a sparrow."

"Functions: materials."

"Rarity: White."

"Weight: 10 grams."

"Comments: This is a feather from a mutated sparrow."

A mutated sparrow? Had the train been attacked by sparrows? Judging by the size of the feather, he assumed that the sparrows must have been about a foot tall. If birds had also mutated, that would be really bad news for air transportation. It might even have to shut down entirely. The worse thing about birds was that they could go much higher than other beasts, making any defense against them more difficult.

They were unable to prevent the arrival of mutated animals, even if the government chopped down the trees and burned the forests. Luo Yuan felt cold at the thought of thousands of big birds flying above the sky of the city. "I hope this won't happen in my city," he tried to comfort himself. With the government burning forests on a big scale, those starved animals had to prey on humans to fill their empty stomachs.

"I have no idea how this happened," Zhao Yali said. She kept shaking while she held onto Luo Yuan's arm.

Luo Yuan did not know how to comfort her, so he just said, "Let's get on the train, otherwise we're going to miss it."

Chapter 14: Yushui City

The two of them hopped on the train. The seat beside Zhao Yali was occupied, so Luo Yuan asked to exchange seats with the person sitting there. He helped Zhao Yali arrange her luggage, and then sat down beside her. There were two girls and a guy sitting across from them, and Luo Yuan naturally paid more attention to the girls. They looked like they had been crying. Their eyes were red and they seemed scared. The guy was tall and skinny, with lots of pimples on his face. He was comforting the girls softly. The three of them seemed quite close to each other, and Luo Yuan assumed that they were studying together at university.

“What happened to the train just now? Why was there so much blood?” Luo Yuan knocked on the desk softly, asking the guy.

The guy looked at Luo Yuan before he explained, “A big bunch of birds was flying this way and hit the train out of the blue. It was lucky that the cabins are thick and strong enough, and that the windows are bulletproof. Otherwise, we would have all been hurt.”

“A big bunch? That many birds?” Luo Yuan asked. He looked doubtful.

A guy in a business suit sitting beside him joined in the conversation, “He’s not exaggerating at all. The sky suddenly went dark, and when I looked up, there were birds covering the sun. Soon there were some weird sounds coming from the windows, and the whole train was shaking. Eventually, the train was forced to stop for more than 10 minutes until the birds left. Look, there are still blood stains on the windows as we speak. I saw at least five

birds hit the window in front of us, and it freaked me out. Thankfully, this is a train and not a plane, otherwise we would have crashed and everybody would have died."

The businessman kept shaking his head. He looked scared.

Luo Yuan checked on the window carefully and found that there were also six white prints on it beside the blood stains. Apparently, they had been caused by the birds' beaks during the collision.

"Thank god we were able to catch the train in time, or we would have been terribly scared," Luo Yuan said, smiling.

The businessman went on, "Things are getting worse, and we can't predict the future. China has been reported to be the most stable country right now. Africa has practically lost contact, and Europe and the US are both in a mess as well. I've heard that many gigantic beasts have made an appearance," he said with a sigh.

"China has a very big population and a small forest area, which is not comparable to other countries," the young guy from university joined the conversation.

"You're all still in university, right? Have you finished your classes already?" Zhao Yali asked as she recovered from the shock.

"A few people have died on the campus, and classes were forced to stop. We're treating it as a winter break, but I don't think we'll be going back to campus anymore," the young guy said helplessly,

looking at Zhao Yali.

She asked him more questions, “What about your degree? Is that a lost cause?”

The two girls began to cry again.

“Who cares about our degree now? There would be no jobs available, even if we had a degree,” the young guy said. Zhao Yali was left speechless, her mouth slightly open.

The train was now moving slowly, getting gradually faster. All the mountain peaks along the way had been burned, but there were new crops growing already. Perhaps there would new forests again in no time. An hour and a half later, they finally arrived at Yushui City. The train slowly moved into the tracks, and the door was opened when it reached the platform. Luo Yuan and Zhao Yali disembarked, following the other passengers. Luo Yuan went up to the courier service counter to collect his wooden box. He opened the box quietly, relieved to see the knife lying inside. He opened his attribute board and allocated the remaining five points to his knife skills.

He closed his eyes and felt instantly energetic. He slowly opened them again and said, “Let’s go!”

“Alright,” Zhao Yali replied and began walking. After a while, she asked, “What happened to you just now? You looked scary.”

“Scary? Are your eyes alright?” Luo Yuan asked.

“I’m not sure, but it felt weird. Perhaps my eyes fooled me.” Zhao Yali looked at Luo Yuan, doubting herself. Luo Yuan wondered whether there was something wrong with him.

He recalled the differences and soon felt the changes. Other than gaining a deeper understanding of the knife skill, he was also more sensitive and alert to the outside world. Plus, he could focus his mind very easily now. He wondered whether upgrading the knife skill could affect his psychological behavior as well. Suddenly, he turned around and looked at Zhao Yali seriously, “Did I look like this just now?” he asked.

Zhao Yali looked into his eyes for a few seconds before quickly looking away. She seemed stressed and covered her own eyes. She hit him once, saying angrily, “Don’t you try to scare me again!”

“Alright, alright,” Luo Yuan said, smiling. He was delighted.

Although it was a complementary effect of upgrading the knife skill, it was still effective. People would get scared of him even before they had begun to fight.

“How did you do that?” Zhao Yali asked.

“I used to practice martial arts before, when I was in university. Perhaps it’s affected my mentality as well. Anyway, people usually get scared of me when they look into my eyes,” Luo Yuan said

calmly.

"So you must be really powerful, right?" Zhao Yali was surprised and curious.

"It depends on who my opponent is. Normal people are usually no match for me."

Luo Yuan was not trying to be humble. He knew that Zhao Yali lacked determination and he needed to boost her confidence. This mission would be a challenging one, and he expected a dangerous and unpredictable journey. He thought it would be good to prepare her psychologically for such a situation in order to avoid any distractions while he was fighting.

"Wow, I wouldn't know if you didn't tell me! You sure know how to keep a secret." Zhao Yali sounded like she was blaming him. She felt relieved and thought there was nothing to be afraid of as long as she stuck by him.

The two of them talked while they walked to the nearby bus station. Luo Yuan noticed that the cars there were weird compared to cars in other places. Bars had been installed on their windcreens and windows, and there were thick iron boards around the cars that also covered the tires. They looked like iron monsters. Zhao Yali was stunned. She could guess how bad the situation in Yushui City was just by looking at the modified cars.

"Let's go! Don't think about it. What bus should we take to your house? Your call," Luo Yuan said as he pulled her away.

"There's no direct bus line to my village. We need to take bus 203 to the East Station and then transfer to another one," she said as she recovered from the shock and pointed to the bus. They hopped on it and sat down. The bus departed after a while.

Yushui City looked desolate. There were few people walking on the streets and most of the shops were closed. The few that were still open had their doors and bars half down. Nobody seemed to be cleaning the streets. There was garbage everywhere and dark red blood stains were still visible on the asphalt. Apparently, there must have been some kind of incident there not long ago. Several armed jeeps passed by transporting fully-armed soldiers. The sound of gunshots could be heard in the distance, making Luo Yuan uneasy. Some passengers disembarking from the bus saw the scene and got scared. Their faces turned pale. They wondered how the city had ended up like this.

Zhao Yali looked out the window and remained silent. Luo Yuan tapped her hand and she grabbed his arm before he could pull it back. Everyone looked depressed and stayed silent. Luckily, nothing happened on the way to the East Station. The station was deserted. There were hardly any people walking around, and a few plastic bags were being blown around in the air. The area became livelier when about a dozen passengers disembarked from the bus.

"We'll take the bus to Shuimen. It's about 30 minutes to our destination," Zhao Yali said as she led the way. There was only one bus to Shuimen, and it looked slightly different. There were blood stains and squashed flesh on its front, and holes all along the rest of it. It looked scary.

Luo Yuan suddenly asked, “Does the bus pass by Yushan?”

Zhao Yali looked surprised as she answered, “Yes, it will pass by a small distance of about 3-4 km.”

Luo Yuan walked into the bus while he thought about something. Zhao Yali inserted four coins into the farebox and they took a seat in the back. There were only about eight passengers on the bus. The driver looked frustrated and kept checking his phone. He went outside to make a call. No one could hear what he was saying, but he returned after one minute with red eyes. Luo Yuan noticed that there was an axe inside the driver compartment. After about five minutes, two girls go on the bus and took a seat in front of Luo Yuan. They made some small talk and then stopped talking altogether.

A moment later, a phone rang. The driver checked his phone but did not pick up the call. He started the engine and drove away from the bus station. Luo Yuan thought that the bus was stuffy and tried to open the window.

One of the girls in front suddenly screamed, "Don't open the window!"

The driver stepped on the brakes very hard and yelled at him in a dialect. Although Luo Yuan did not understand what he had said, he knew it wasn't something good. He quickly apologized and closed the window. The driver continued to nag him for a while before he drove away again.

Luo Yuan was confused and turned around to ask Zhao Yali, “What did he say just now?”

Zhao Yali bit her lip while she explained, “He told you not to open the window because that would attract rats.”

Luo Yuan was terrified. He quickly looked out the window. There was a mountain in the distance surrounded by mist. There were lots of holes in the middle of the mountain that exposed the yellowish gray stone inside it. There was even smoke in some places. That had to be from the bombs. He recalled the rumors of armed trucks entering the city. He was suddenly shocked. He wondered why Yushan was getting bombed. Then he connected the dots linking Yushan, the rodent attacks and the armed trucks. Yushan had to be where the rats came from.

Chapter 15: Mountain Pass

“Ah!” someone in the bus shouted.

Zhao Yali grabbed Luo Yuan’s arm tightly. Her fingernails were poking into his skin but he didn’t feel it. He was distracted by the sight of a gray rat the size of a kitten speeding across the road outside the window. It was extremely big compared to normal rats, and it seemed very brave. It did not leave, it just hid somewhere nearby. Its entire body was gray and its fur was shiny. It had very sharp teeth and a pair of blood red eyes.

"Come on, you bloody animal!" The driver sounded mad as he pressed on the accelerator. The bus moved at a fast speed.

The rat kept watching it until it had disappeared. Then it jumped across the road and ran towards the field. They were near Yushan when the bus reached a fork in the road and turned into the mountain pass. Most of the trees in the area had been burned. They could even see the bombshells. The most dangerous thing, though, was the small stones and rocks on the road. A bunch of them hit the iron boards of the bus, producing irritating sounds. Despite that, it was an overall smooth journey, which made Luo Yuan feel slightly relieved.

The bus drove on for a few minutes and then took a turn. The driver suddenly pressed on the brakes and stopped the vehicle. Right there, in the middle of the road, was another bus that wasn’t moving. The driver looked at it and took out his phone nervously. He dialed a few times, but nobody picked up. In the end, he threw his phone to the ground, checked the area around them and

grabbed the axe. He talked in dialect with a few passengers who were sitting up front, and then pointed to a button inside the driver's panel. He pushed the door open, got off, and then shut it again. Then he started walking towards the other bus.

“What did he say?” Luo Yuan asked.

“He said that something must have happened up front and he has to go check. He asked to open the door for him when he returns,” Zhao Yali said anxiously. Everyone was silent. The atmosphere had gotten a lot heavier.

“Ahhhh!” someone screamed loudly.

Everyone saw the driver running back to the bus, followed closely by about ten rats. He looked extremely panicked and desperate. Apparently, the rats could run a lot faster than him because a big rat had bit into his thigh in no time. The pain had the driver slumping to the ground along with his axe.

More rats rushed towards him and bit into his body with their sharp teeth. He was bleeding and screaming, and he used every last bit of his energy to get up from the ground and pull down the rats one by one in an effort to escape. The smell of blood attracted even more rats, who slowly came closer. The driver was still about 10 meters away from the bus and was trying extremely hard to reach the door. He kept tapping on it, asking for help.

“Open the door! OPEN THE DOOR!”

The passengers sitting up front looked pale and frightened. A young man got up to open the door, but a woman pulled him away and he just shut up. There were lots of people in the world who tried to be helpful to show their kindness. Some of them donated money to victims of natural disasters, others gave up their seats to elders on the bus, and others donated free blood. All those actions were easy because they did not cause them any major injuries. However, when actions of kindness became a threat to one's own welfare or even their life, people became selfish.

"Open the door, please! Please!" the driver begged the passengers. He felt disappointed and hopeless when they refused to open the door. Meanwhile, more than 10 rats rushed up to him and bit him. "You son of a bitch! Karma will get you!" the driver moaned as he screamed in agony.

As more and more mutated rats jumped on him, blood flowed from his entire body like a river. He lay in a big pool of it. He had lost too much energy and left several blood stains on the side of the bus while he scratched it, seeking for help.

Luo Yuan clenched his fists tightly. He wanted to open the door for the driver, but he eventually slumped back against his seat helplessly. He knew those rats would come into the bus and bring chaos and death if he opened the door. He might not be able to protect Zhao Yali in that chaos. Even though he was good at fighting, the most he would be able to do was protect himself. He was not a hero, he could only try to protect himself and those he cared about. He turned away from the cruel scene. He didn't want to watch the driver die in such a horrible manner. A few rats climbed up to the iron bars and looked inside the bus with their bloody eyes. It was very quiet inside. The only sound was the

heavy breathing of the passengers.

More rats were gathering at the base of the mountain, all of them rushing towards the bus Luo Yuan was in. In no time, the entire bus had been covered by hundreds of rats, the whole cabin turning dark as they blocked the sunlight.

"Oh my god! They're biting the iron bars!" the girl who was sitting in front of Luo Yuan said, screaming and crying simultaneously.

Many of the rats had begun to bite the bars, a white powder falling down along with the iron flakes. Zhao Yali was holding Luo Yuan tightly. He could feel her entire body shaking. Suddenly, there was complete chaos, and the whole bus started to shake. Some people tried to call the cops, but nobody seemed to be succeeding. Perhaps the police were too busy to answer.

"The iron bars won't last long. Can anyone drive the bus and get us out of here?" an old man with black framed spectacles asked in dialect.

After a while, a young man replied, "I only have a Grade C license. I have never driven this type of vehicle before."

"How long have you been driving?" the old man asked while looking at the rats outside.

"Two years. I haven't driven recently though due to the

escalating gas prices," the young man replied.

"I guess you're our only option. Go ahead and try," the old man said. The young man nodded while his face turned pale. He walked to the front and sat down in the driver's seat.

He was as white as paper as he looked at the scary rats moving around on the windscreen. He took a deep breath and whispered something to himself. He laid his hands on the steering wheel, but let go instantly. A few minutes later, the bus had finally taken off again. No one uttered a single word, because they knew the young man was completely panicked.

That was when one of the iron wires broke.

Everyone inside the bus started screaming and the young driver became terrified. He suddenly stepped on the accelerator. The bus was now moving like a mad cow, running randomly at high speed until it hit the deserted bus in the other lane.

"No! Stop!" someone shouted.

"My goodness!" Luo Yuan was in shock. He quickly pulled Zhao Yali into his arms to shield her.

In almost no time, their bus had crashed into the other bus, all its windows breaking in an instant. The scariest thing, though, was that its bars broke too, a big hole forming inside them. The bus shook for a short while before it finally stopped. Zhao Yali was

leaning in Luo Yuan's arms while she secretly looked at his handsome face. He looked strong and determined, and just being beside him made her feel safe.

Luo Yuan released her while he asked, "Are you alright? Did you get hurt?"

Zhao Yali returned to reality. She shook her head and replied, "No, I'm fine. I was just shocked."

"That's good then. Don't worry, we'll be fine," Luo Yuan tried to comfort her. She seemed completely lost. The rest of the passengers were still in their seats. Most of them had not gotten hurt. They'd just gotten scared.

The only exception was the young driver, who was leaning over the steering wheel, not moving at all. Blood was flowing and dripping between his fingers, but sadly no one noticed his injuries. The two buses had been squashed together. Luo Yuan and some of the other guys in the bus stood up and tried to look into the empty bus next to them. He suddenly turned his gaze away. He felt an electric current shock his spine.

Chapter 16: Escape!

There were many bones and dirty rags with blood stains all over the buss' floor beside them. A few white skulls were still rolling due to the earlier collision, which made them feel like they were wandering in hell. Water was dripping down and the bus was filled with a pungent smell of urine. A rat jumped onto the bus beside them and walked towards Luo Yuan. Those who were sitting in front started moving to the back.

"Get some weapons! I don't believe we can't defeat them!" a ferocious looking guy shouted out, standing up. He glanced across the bus, then walked to the front and grabbed the fire axe. A few other guys found some tools nearby the driver's seat, such as a spanner wrench, hammer and an iron bar.

The rat squeezed through the broken grills and jumped onto the dashboard of the bus. A few of the women screamed and some of the guys subconsciously swallowed their saliva, then looked at each other. They could not move. However, the rat did not attack immediately but kept on making a noise.

"Hit it! It's trying to call its buddies!" the old man shouted out.

Everyone was scared. The guy with the fire axe looked at those with weapons and said,

"Let's fight, we have no choice anymore. Otherwise everyone is going to die."

"Fine! Come on!"

"I'm going to bring them along if I really need to die!"

All of them were trying to boost their courage. The guy with the fire axe shouted loudly and walked towards the rat. The rat screeched and quickly ran back to the other bus, disappearing from sight.

Everyone applauded the victory! However, it did not last more than 30 seconds. There were more rats coming into the bus, and slowly the cabin became very dark. Luo Yuan sensed the danger and quickly took out his Zhanmadao and stood up. He pulled Zhao Yali up and whispered, "Follow me."

"I don't have my luggage." Zhao Yali said.

"Just leave it behind. Hold my hand now, we need to leave. This is very dangerous!" Luo Yuan urged her.

"Alright, alright." She had lost her mind and could just follow.

"Trust me! I'll protect you. Do you remember I've told you that I've learned martial arts before?" Luo Yuan tried to comfort her. He held her hand and walked toward the driving area. Luo Yuan wouldn't be able to utilize his skills in this small space once the rats rushed into the bus. The people around would only burden him. He pressed the switch to open the door.

“Pshhhhhh!”

The door slowly opened.

“What do you want to do?” a guy asked in a mad shout. “Are you trying to kill yourself? Close the door! Hurry up!” Everyone was frightened and scolded Luo Yuan.

Luo Yuan did not show any expression but spun his knife for a short while and said coldly, “The knife has no eyes, I don’t want to hurt any one of you, so please don’t make me. I hope you could give way, we need to leave now.” A few guys were trying to stop him by force but they quickly thought better of it and backed off. “Let’s go!” Luo Yuan quickly escaped with Zhao Yali and ran toward the exit. The bus’ door was shut immediately once they got out.

Luo Yuan took a quick glance of the surrounding area and realized that it was better than what he imagined. There were only five rats further away in front of the road, and the rest were gone. Apparently, they were all inside the bus which they had just escaped from. He felt relieved for a second and then quickly ran away with Zhao Yali. Soon, the rats noticed them and began to rush after. “Yuan!” Zhao Yali screamed.

“Don’t be afraid! Keep running!” Luo Yuan said calmly after taking a glance at the mutated rats which were getting closer. Suddenly, those rats stopped chasing them. They seemed to be scared.

The rats began to slowly turn back when Luo Yuan walked toward them. “What’s happening?” Luo Yuan wondered. Then he realized the snakeskin bulletproof jacket he was wearing had the effect of terrorizing rats and frogs. However, it did not seem to be working on mutated animals. After a while, the rats overcame their phobia and continued their chase. And they were getting nearer! 10 meters, 5 meters, 3 meters! It was so close!

Suddenly, Luo Yuan released Zhao Yali’s hand. He bent down and increased his speed. Zhanmadao shone due to the reflecting sunlight. Two heads of the mutated rats flew up to the sky, followed by blood spilling on the floor. Luo Yuan spun his knife and slaughtered another rat which had tried to jump on him. He managed to avoid the blood gushing out of it. He just simply pulled the knife, and one of the rats’ abdomens was opened up. Luo Yuan was good at using his knife, and the rats were dead even before they could get near him.

Zhao Yali was shocked by what she just saw, it was beyond her imagination even if she knew that Luo Yuan had learned martial arts before.

The dead rats were lying on the ground. There was a lot of screaming in the bus behind them, and they could see the bus shaking vigorously. From time to time, they also saw blood spilling on the windows. Luo Yuan turned his head around after watching for a few seconds and said, “We need to leave as soon as possible. Otherwise, we will be in big trouble after the rats conquer the bus. They will come after us!”

Zhao Yali turned around and looked at the bus. She covered her

mouth with a sympathetic expression and asked, “Are they going to die?”

“Don’t think about it, it’s too late for us to go back. Let’s go!” Luo Yuan sighed. He might consider helping them if he was alone. However, he had Zhao Yali with him and her safety should be his priority.

Zhao Yali nodded her head and grabbed his hand tightly. Both of them continued to run forward. Luckily, there weren’t many rats along the journey after that. Perhaps, they were all having a feast on the bus, or have been killed by the bombs.

The two of them didn’t bump into any big group of mutated rats along the way. And the few animals they did see, Luo Yuan managed to kill them easily.

The mountain pass was only about 4 km away, and they had been driven to around a midway point. It took them around half an hour of running to finally leave this ‘road of hell’. The highway was very quiet as they did not see a single person, nor a car pass by. The trees on both sides of the highway had been chopped down, and the farmlands nearby hadn’t managed to escape from the fire either.

The sun was going down and Luo Yuan turned around to ask Zhao Yali, “Shall we find a place to stay first? The sky is getting darker and it will become more dangerous once the night comes.” Zhao Yali nodded her head anxiously while holding his arm tightly.

“Are there any hotels nearby?” Luo Yuan asked.

“I have no idea, I haven’t come back for a long time,” she said, trying her best to recall old memories.

“Let’s go to the village ahead of us then,” Luo Yuan suggested, looking at the place where the smoke kept coming out from.

“That’s Choo Village but I don’t know anyone from there,” Zhao Yali said.

“Let’s check it out first then,” Luo Yuan replied.

Suddenly, Zhao Yali’s phone rang and she picked up the call. “Hi mom, do you need anything? Oh, I don’t think we can make it back by tonight since the bus’s tire punctured. I think we need to stay overnight in the city and will have to go back the next morning.” Zhao Yali’s cheeks suddenly became red, she turned away to avoid facing Luo Yuan and said, “Alright, he will be staying in another room which is very far from me. Yes, mom, I got it. I’m not a kid anymore. Thanks, mom. See you tomorrow.”

Zhao Yali tried to calm herself and walked toward Luo Yuan. She did not hold his arm anymore but kept a distance instead. Luo Yuan definitely knew what the content of the phone call was about. He understood that all parents worried about their daughters’ safety.

Choo Village was not that big. It had a population of approximately 500 families.

However, it was near an industrial area which helped to increase the population, as well as the income. The main road of the village became a commercial street and both sides of the street were filled with shops. Soon, it would be a well-developed and prosperous place. However, it was almost empty now, and most of the shops were closed.

Luo Yuan and Zhao Yali could not find a single hotel after walking around for a long while. As the sky was turning darker and darker, they agreed to knock on the door of a double-story house. After a few minutes, the door opened.

Behind it stood a skinny man who looked to be around 50-years-old. He let the door open only by a small margin, and peeped through it with his entire body pressed against the door. He was ready to shut it the moment it seemed necessary. "What are you doing here?" he asked in his local dialect.

Luo Yuan hinted for Zhao Yali to talk to the skinny guy by rolling his eyes and moving his eyebrows as if he couldn't understand what the skinny man had just said. Zhao Yali replied in the local dialect as well. "Hi, we're from Zhao Village. I should have gone home by now but the bus' tire punctured. Do you think it would be possible for us to stay at your place for just a night? We would leave the very next morning."

"No way! Please go somewhere else. We don't have space to accommodate you!" The skinny man felt relieved when he found

out that they were from the nearby village. However, what Zhao Yali had said wasn't convincing enough. Recently several crimes had happened in Choo Village, and the man didn't want to take the risk.

Zhao Yali wanted to continue talking but Luo Yuan stopped her. He took out his wallet and pulled out three bank notes which were CNY 100 each and said, "How about CNY 300 per night, dinner included? You should know we are not bad people."

The skinny man looked at both Luo Yuan and Zhao Yali. "The girl looks polite and gentle, even if she's full of anxiety. The guy looks quiet and is fair. Besides that, his eyes are clear. They shouldn't be bad people," he thought in his head. The skinny man looked at those bank notes in Luo Yuan's hand and seemed to be keen on the deal. He then changed his accent and spoke in Mandarin, "CNY 500 per night. Come on in, please, if you agree. Otherwise, please leave!"

Luo Yuan was happy with the counter offer and said, "Deal!" He then took out another two 100 bank notes and passed it to the skinny man. He took the money and began to count. Finally, he felt relieved and opened the door wide. "Come on in!" he said.

Chapter 17: Night Lodging

Luo Yuan and Zhao Yali entered the courtyard. At this moment, the skinny man saw Luo Yuan holding a knife contaminated with some fresh blood and his face became pale. He quickly stepped back and shouted out, "What do you want? We have no money!"

Luo Yuan frowned. From the reaction of the man he guessed that things here were obviously more chaotic. He then smiled and said, "Don't be nervous, we are not bad guys. The knife is just for self-defense. Without the knife, we couldn't have escaped from the mountains. We encountered a dozen mutated rats that would have turned the two of us into white bones on the roadside."

The skinny man looked surprised, obviously in disbelief, but on the surface he just nodded his head repeatedly. At this time, a middle-aged woman heard the conversation. She came out with a kitchen knife and then started screaming.

Luo Yuan frowned again and wondered why the family was so quick to startle. Even speaking in a kind manner was useless. So this time he spoke in a cold voice, "I don't want to cause any trouble. I just need to stay for one night and tomorrow morning I will leave. Nothing else. Tell her to stop screaming."

The skinny man quickly pulled the middle-aged woman away and dragged her to his side. He quickly whispered in her ear, and soon, her mood improved a lot. She reluctantly smiled and said, "Luckily you told me we have guests. Come, come on in and sit."

"Please, go get the dinner ready and add more dishes, I will stay here to entertain," the skinny man whispered to his wife, and then talked to Luo Yuan and Zhao Yali. "Let me make some tea for the two of you."

The middle-aged woman looked at her husband with some worry and hesitation but then entered the kitchen. The three of them in the meantime entered the living room, and the skinny man brought three cups of tea.

Luo Yuan quietly checked it with his super power, and took a sip after confirming it wasn't poisonous. He said once more, "You don't have to be afraid. She and I are from Donghu City, and we're here to visit relatives. This knife is just for self-defense. You must know how dangerous it is out there now."

"Yes, yes!" the skinny man replied, laughing bluntly. His eyes gazed at the dazzling weapon from time to time. But the action seemed quite restrained.

Luo Yuan looked at the sky which was now dark, then at the living room that had no lights. He felt strange and asked, "Is there electricity here?"

"The cable was bitten by a rat, so we have been without power for three days now, since no one has come to repair it," the skinny man carefully explained with a smile.

"Is there any water?" Zhao Yali asked as she was sweaty and greasy. It would be uncomfortable for her to sleep at night without

a bath.

"Yes, we have both cold and hot water since the roof is fitted with a water heater."

The skinny man stayed alert through the evening. Luo Yuan tried to chat for a while but then lost interest. Thus, in the end, the three of them just sat at the table drinking tea.

Soon, the food was ready.

The middle-aged women quickly served their food on the table. Although they had added two dishes, the meal was very simple. Aside from a bowl of meat, the rest were vegetables.

The middle-aged women sat down and felt the atmosphere was odd. She looked at the skinny man and then said to Luo Yuan and Zhao Yali, "Please help yourselves. It is just a simple dinner because it is very difficult to get vegetables and meat. All the greenery you see here is grown in our own backyard. It is all very fresh. And the dish is preserved dog meat. We killed it a few days ago, so it is still very fresh. Taste it."

"That's very kind. This is a lot more to eat than I have in Donghu City," Luo Yuan said, and smiled politely.

"Why did you kill the dog? It's cruel," Zhao Yali stated as she looked at the bowl of meat. She'd had a dog at her home and every time she needed to leave the animal would follow her as far as

possible because it was very attached to her. So seeing the family's dog killed, she could not help but worry about her own family's one.

The middle-aged woman looked at Luo Yuan's expressionless face, then smiled and explained, "My husband looked after the dog since it was small but there were several mad dogs in the village that killed people. We were worried about the incident, hence we put our own down. There are no more dogs in the village now."

No wonder they hadn't heard any barking along the way as they were being killed. Thinking about it, such animals were always a hidden danger. Although harmless to the owner, dogs could be dangerous to other people. Raising one also consumed a lot of food which at the moment could be an unusually heavy burden. At least they could also get a large amount of meat after killing the beast. It was more cost-efficient to just do that.

Luo Yuan had another thought about the bowl of dog meat and with the information that surfaced in his mind, his face could not help but change slightly

"Seasoned Mutated Dog Meat"

"Material: Mutated dog meat, Salt"

"Rarity: White"

"Weight: 300 grams"

"Effect: Rapid recovery of fatigue, enhances the body's immunity system"

"Evaluation: this is a variant of a simply cooked dog meat, which contains traces of active energy."

Luo Yuan was slightly surprised. The food made from mutated creatures actually had these kind of effects. The effects were subtle and generally undetectable, except if he used his identification power. Otherwise, he didn't know when he would have found out about them.

The mutated dog was only white ranked, which was the lowest level of mutation. Luo Yuan wondered about the pale blue level of the snake he had encountered earlier, and what its effects would be. But he did not regret not trying to fight it as the giant snake had also swallowed a few people. Even if he had gotten a chance to eat it, he wouldn't have tried to. He would have only paid more attention to it.

After saying a few words, the atmosphere became somewhat dull.

The couple occasionally winked at each other and communicated silently. Luo Yuan continued to eat and pretended to see nothing. They quickly finished the dinner and the sky gradually became dark.

The woman stood up, smiled and said, "There are no rooms upstairs, so will you be okay staying in the room downstairs? I'll tidy it up for you now and make the bed soon."

"Sure!" Luo Yuan nodded his head. He knew they were both being highly alert, hence he didn't want to create any more trouble.

The woman looked relieved. She smiled good naturally and said, "Qi Yuan, can you bring over two pairs of slippers and some candles?" She then turned to the guests, "If you want to bathe, you can use the bathroom downstairs." From the words now and previously, it could be seen that the master of this family was the wife, as the husband was being very quiet.

At this moment, Zhao Yali suddenly pulled Luo Yuan away. Luo Yuan began to feel a little strange, but he quickly responded, "Can you add another bed? We are not a couple so sharing a bed is inappropriate for us."

The woman frowned as she said, "There are only two beds in the house. What about an extra mattress?" "Good!" Luo Yuan nodded his head.

A moment later, the couple left and headed upstairs. Luo Yuan entered the room, handed the candle to Zhao Yali and said, "You go bathe first."

The outside was dark and coupled with the new environment, Zhao Yali held the candle with fear. She replied, "or... you bathe first?"

"Nothing to be afraid of," Luo Yuan told her, smiling, and continued, "Do you want me to accompany you to the bath?"

Zhao Yali stared at him fiercely, hesitated for a long time, bit her teeth, and then left the bedroom. She immediately shut the door after entering the bathroom. Her heart was pounding in her chest. She had always been afraid of ghost movies and could easily get scared for several days. Sometimes she even refused to go to the bathroom when she needed to pee in the middle of the night. Not to mention after such a horrible experience as today.

When Luo Yuan was around, she did not feel anything, but now when she was alone, she felt that every minute was excruciating. She was afraid that there were monsters which might break into the bathroom. She felt like leaving the small room as soon as she could. Taking off her clothes, she stood under the shower and bathed quickly.

When she was about to put on her clothes, she hesitated. Most of her clothes had been lost with her luggage, and there were no clean ones to change into. Her t-shirt and skirt were still clean, but her underwear had a dark circle in the middle. Her face became a bit hot as she recalled the times when she was in danger and almost peed her pants. It was too disgusting to wear that kind of underwear again. If she chose not to wear it, though, she had to be careful not to expose herself.

She dressed up again, feeling chilly at her butt as she wasn't accustomed to not wearing her underwear. She opened the bathroom door and hurried back to the bedroom. She found Luo

Yuan holding a cloth and focused on wiping clean his knife's blade. The fear in her heart disappeared immediately as she felt secure with Luo Yuan around.

"You showered so quickly!" Luo Yuan gently put down the knife and returned it to the sheath.

"I'm done. Please come back quickly!" Zhao Yali cried as she did not want to stay alone here.

Luo Yuan helplessly replied, "I will come back soon. There's really nothing to be afraid of. If there is something entering the house, they must pass through the main door. I will come if I hear it."

"But I'm scared!" Zhao Yali said as she sat down on the edge of the bed with a pitiful look on her face. She suddenly recalled that she was not wearing her underwear and quickly pressed down on her skirt, standing up.

"Don't think about it. Fear causes most people to scare themselves. Think of something happy or play a game while I take a shower," Luo Yuan replied, and then got up and headed to the bathroom.

When he came back from the shower, he found the door was locked from the inside and knocked on the door.

"Who is it?" Zhao Yali asked with a trembling voice.

"It's me, open the door," Luo Yuan reluctantly said.

Zhao Yali opened the door and quickly turned back, walking a few steps forward then jumping onto the bed and covering herself to her head. Luo Yuan shut the door, feeling speechless when he saw the scene of Zhao Yali covering herself from head to toe. "Is this the only way you can fall asleep? Don't you feel hot?"

"It's not hot," Zhao Yali answered in a muffled voice.

"Is it alright if I blow off the candle?" Luo Yuan asked as he took off his clothes.

"Don't blow it off!" Zhao Yali anxiously replied, while lifting the quilt and revealing her head.

"There is only a short length left, and if you want to go to the toilet later, there will be no light," Luo Yuan said as he observed the candle which was only about the length of a thumb. At this rate, it was going to burn out soon.

"Then blow it out. Your phone still has some battery left, right?" Zhao Yali asked.

"Why? There is half of the battery left, but don't bother thinking of keeping it on for the whole night. Based on the situation in Choo Village, your home probably has no electricity, either. And I'll need the phone later." Luo Yuan knew her well enough to stop her

before she even made her intentions clear.

He blew out the candle, and the room turned completely black.

Chapter 18: A Night With A Wolf

A Night With A Wolf

The room was very quiet and they could clearly hear noises from the outside. Yet the small room seemed to be separated from that world which made the two feel lonely and forgotten by the rest.

"Are you going to fall asleep?" Zhao Yali asked anxiously.

"Yes, soon. What's up?" Luo Yuan replied impatiently as he was exhausted from the fights he'd had throughout the day. He could literally fall asleep instantly.

"I can't sleep," Zhao Yali said, energized by hearing his voice.

"But I'm going to fall asleep soon. Let's talk tomorrow, I'm tired." Luo Yuan did not want to continue the conversation anymore.

A few minutes later, Zhao Yali called him again, "Yuan! Yuan?"

"What's up!?" Luo Yuan asked, annoyed.

The room was silent for a few seconds. "Why don't you sleep here?" Zhao Yali asked with a sobbing voice. Every time she closed her eyes, the blood scene repeated in her head. She almost fainted.

Luo Yuan opened his eyes and said insincerely, "This is not

appropriate, though!"

"Don't worry, the bed is big enough for two. But, you're not allowed to touch me!" Zhao Yali said, biting her sexy lip.

"Alright, I'll go over then," Luo Yuan agreed and switched on the torchlight on his phone. He saw Zhao Yali's curved body at the corner of a blanket. He then flipped the blanket and squeezed underneath it. Immediately he smelled her aroma which was charming enough to make him feel 'thirsty'.

He was a healthy young man and that was an active period for a man. So how could he not have any reaction when a beautiful lady slept right beside him? He began to feel uneasy as his blood started to boil. He hesitated for a while and then his hands began to explore in the dark. Suddenly, his hand slipped and landed on one of her thighs.

Zhao Yali's body shook a little and she quickly pressed on his hand to stop him. "Yuan, don't move," she told him, breathing heavily.

Luo Yuan was excited as Zhao Yali did not seem to resist his advances. Instead, her actions were quite seductive. His hand reached for her bosom and he was pleasantly surprised; she was not wearing a bra! He could feel her smooth, round breasts over the cover of her shirt.

"Little Yuan! You promised not to touch me!" Zhao Yali whispered helplessly as she tried to push his hand away but to no

avail.

She felt a tingling sensation that made her temperature rise as he continued to caress her body. His hands moved upwards from her seductive thighs and stopped for a moment when it found a soft, smooth spot with a little hair. He then lowered his fingers and realized that it was wet!

"Oh dear, where are your panties?" Luo Yuan asked with an excited expression.

"Little Yuan, how could you do that!" Zhao Yali felt extremely embarrassed, her face crimson as a fully cooked crab. She covered her face as she moaned softly as she was always shy.

"Yali, you're amazing, I can't resist anymore," Luo Yuan whispered into her ear.

As soon as his words left his lips, he quickly took off her shirt and dress, finally exposing her naked body. He then proceeded to remove his pants, exposing his penis. Spreading her snowy white legs without her consent, he then thrust his penis into her wet vagina.

"Ahh. Slow, slower..." Zhao Yali whimpered as she had never felt such a sensation ever in her life. The orgasm took over her like a wave as her body tensed up, her hands grabbing the bedsheets involuntarily.

As they made love, Luo Yuan began to thrust faster and faster as he found her trying to keep up with his thrusts by moving her body. Every thrust he made hit her in just the right places, sending waves of pleasure over her body as she had an orgasm, one after the other. Her skin was flushed, pink with the blood rushing through her veins while her mouth was wide open, gasping for air.

She was breathing heavily before but now she was moaning, louder and louder. Her sexy legs tensed up as Luo Yuan continued thrusting in and out of her; the bed shaking vigorously, making a noise that paled in comparison to their lovemaking.

Zhao Yali tried her level best to keep up with him, trying to have another orgasm as she had not experienced it until Luo Yuan. All shame was forgotten as she indulged in her actions with him, wishing it would never end. His body in her warm embrace, her mind went blank as she reached her peak. Her body shivering as she moved her hips at breakneck speed, moaning loudly. They finally came together, liquid gushing around inside her.

The next morning, Zhao Yali woke up from her dream. She was recalling something, and subconsciously, she touched her pubic region and suddenly her cheeks became red. She noticed that her pubic region was dry and there was some mud around the area. "I must be crazy! How could I do that?" She felt like killing herself when she recalled what she had done with Luo Yuan last night. She used both her hands to support her chin and later slowly put on her clothes. "Would I get pregnant? Although my period has just ended and it's far from ovulation, it could still be quite risky," Zhao Yali thought in her mind.

She left the room and proceeded to the living room. Both of the house owners were hiding in the kitchen and peeping at the backyard. Zhao Yali was curious, so she turned her attention to the backyard and saw Luo Yuan practicing his knife skills. He emphasized on the practical part, and used every single point of upgrade to increase his power to attack better. There was nothing fancy in his skills but every strike was powerful enough to kill, and it made people keep a distance.

Zhao Yali felt uncomfortable simply by watching him from afar. Although she had seen him fight many times, Luo Yuan almost always finished in a very short time. She could not remember his skills exactly but she knew they were quite good overall. Only now she understood how truly skillful he was.

A few minutes later, Luo Yuan finished his training. He looked at Zhao Yali and asked, "You're awake?"

Zhao Yali avoided looking at him and replied, "Yes."

"Well rested?" Luo Yuan tried to find something to talk to her.

Zhao Yali stared at him for a few seconds and refused to talk. Luo Yuan felt awkward and pretended to change topics. "Go get yourself ready for breakfast. We should leave before the rain comes."

Zhao Yali agreed and walked toward the bathroom. The hosts could not wait to send Luo Yuan and Zhao Yali away from their house.

Yesterday had been sunny but today promised to be a gloomy day. The sky was still grayish even though it was almost 9 am. It was going to rain soon.

"How far away is your home?" Luo Yuan asked.

"I'm not sure. I only know it took about 20 minutes to drive and then another 10 to reach the place on foot," Zhao Yali replied after thinking about it.

"Let's see what we can do. I think we'll need to walk if we can't get a cab," Luo Yuan said.

They arrived at the transport station and were disappointed. The road was empty, without a car in sight.

"I don't think we'll be able to get a car. The incident from yesterday was a big case, so the road is probably closed for investigation or cleaning," Luo Yuan said. "We'll need to rely on our legs then."

They walked separately, one striding at the front and the other behind. The incident from last night seemed to be bothering them. In fact, they were trying to control their emotions and make things return to normal between them.

Zhao Yali looked at Luo Yuan who was walking ahead of her and felt uneasy. She was ashamed of herself as her fiancé had just

passed away barely two weeks ago, and she had already slept with another guy.

Worst of all, she had enjoyed it, which was something she had never felt when she was with her fiancé. She felt so guilty and regretful. Suddenly, she asked Luo Yuan, "When are you going back to Donghu city?"

Luo Yuan was shocked and replied, "I'll go back once you reach home. I'm worried about the things I kept in the house."

Although Zhao Yali had expected his departure and it was also what she wanted in the first place, for some reason she felt disappointed when he said that. She lowered her head and continued walking, faster than before, and kicking stones along the road to relieve her anger.

Suddenly, there were seven or eight people who came out from a factory nearby. They held iron bars, short knives, and other similar weapons. There were weird expressions on their faces when they saw Luo Yuan and Zhao Yali, and they seemed to be planning something. After a while, they began to laugh and walk toward Luo Yuan and Zhao Yali.

Luo Yuan looked at them and frowned. He told Zhao Yali to stay further away. "Those are bad people, so you stay here."

Only then did Zhao Yali notice them. She raised her head up and quickly backed away a few steps from shock. She asked, "Will we be alright?"

Luo Yuan replied with confidence, "Yes, it shouldn't be a big problem."

The way they walked showed that they were just some useless jerks who were good at bullying normal citizens. They were too lousy to be Luo Yuan's opponents. Zhao Yali felt relieved after hearing her companion's words.

Chapter 19: Murder

A few of them came closer, led by a young guy who looked around 24-years-old. He looked reckless but there was a gun strapped to his waist. He was holding an iron bar in one hand and beating it against the other's palm every once in awhile. Upon approaching them, he arrogantly said, "You're quite brave, huh? Didn't even try to run when you saw us coming. I thought I'd have to go after you!"

"Boss, you don't need to bullshit him."

"You, man! Leave your weapon and wallet here, while the girl, she must stay! Such a beautiful lady... must be a good one! Seems like we are going to be busy tonight!" another gangster said while looking at Zhao Yali and drooling.

Zhao Yali's face turned slightly pale. She asked Luo Yuan, "Should we call the police?"

"The police? Are you kidding me?"

"It's the end of the world, so who cares? If you don't believe us, you can try calling." Several gangsters laughed.

"Are the police not working anymore?" Although Luo Yuan didn't understand their dialect, he could guess the general meaning.

"I can't stop laughing man! There are so many people dying every

day and you think the police have nothing better to do? Nobody is going to investigate even if I kill you now. If you don't want to leave and want to be the hero, won't you regret it?" The leader of the gang laughed crazily but felt somewhat uneasy. But he calmed down once he remembered the gun at his waist.

Looking at the lawless actions of these people, it seemed like they were saying the truth. "Does that mean it is okay to kill you, too?" Luo Yuan asked quietly.

The gang weren't afraid and didn't take even the smallest of steps backward. Their head man reached for the pistol at his waist, but Luo Yuan had long noticed it and was definitely not going to give him the opportunity to use it. He adjusted his footing and propelled himself forward. His body moved like an arrow and he took out his knife before anyone was able to respond. His long knife easily slid out from its sheath and he quickly sliced off the opponent's right hand that held the gun. The hand fell onto the ground and the gang's head released a mournful scream.

A few of the gang members looked horrified. Things happened too fast and they no longer knew whether they should stay or retreat.

Luo Yuan kicked the pistol away from the detached hand. Without a gun, these bullies were no match for him.

"Kill him, kill him!" the leader of the gang ordered while clutching his injured hand and crying hysterically. He was full of anger aimed at Luo Yuan. Several bullies hesitated as they knew they had encountered a stronger than usual opponent and now

were very fearful.

Luo Yuan hesitated whether to kill the leader or not as he saw the anger in the young man's eyes.

His moral ethics and the concern of being arrested delayed his decision. However, Zhao Yali would be in trouble if he didn't kill the leader now. She would be staying nearby while he left to return to his own place.

"Yali, please close your eyes," Luo Yuan said suddenly.

The gangsters' leader seemed to sense something wrong and tried to move backward. He shouted to his followers, "Beat him! You idiots! Do you think he will let you go?"

"Shut up!" Luo Yuan yelled at the lousy leader and walked toward him. He raised his knife and sliced the leader's neck. The poor leader opened his eyes wide and pressed his remaining hand to his neck, trying to stop the blood from oozing out. He wanted to say something but he was no longer able to speak and his body slowly fell down in a puddle of blood.

Something was stimulated in Luo Yuan's mind while watching the poor leader fall. He then looked at the other gangsters with murderous eyes. He wondered whether he should just kill all of them to avoid any unnecessary trouble in the future, since he had already killed one anyway.

All of them were bullies and had done many bad things; Luo Yuan didn't need to feel guilty even if he killed them all. It was a good deed to defeat evil people. He took a moment to convince himself of that and very soon didn't hesitate anymore.

Those bullies sensed that something was wrong and tried to escape. Unfortunately, it was already too late. Luo Yuan acted very swiftly and his knife sliced through one of the bullies' necks, his head flying through the air and falling on the ground. Luo Yuan then took a few leaps to reach another bully, his blade stabbing into the bully's neck and then coming out on its other side.

Cut, chop, strike, and slice! None of the bullies were able to escape. Luo Yuan managed to kill all of them with his 12-points of dexterity.

Most of the bullies tried to escape but in the end, all of them got murdered. He only spent about 20 seconds to kill all of them. He shook his knife to try and remove the blood from the blade, then returned it to the sheath.

During the killing process, Luo Yuan was full of excitement, however, now all he felt was fear and regret. What if the police found him? He turned around and saw Zhao Yali sitting on the floor; she looked frightened.

He quickly ran over and asked, "Are you alright? I told you to close your eyes, why didn't you listen to me?"

"Murderer! You killed those people!" Zhao Yali said to herself

without looking at Luo Yuan.

"Don't worry, just a few bullies. We should leave now, otherwise, we will be in trouble if someone sees us!" he told her, and immediately realized he'd said the wrong thing. But it was a bit too late to regret it.

His concern had been for the consequences of murdering instead of the killing itself. He felt that killing people was almost the same as killing those mutated rats. For a moment he wondered since when was he like that. Previously, he'd never dared to even fight anyone, and now he was fine with killing.

"Yes, you're right! We should go!" Zhao Yali responded immediately. But when she was about to get up from the ground, she felt numb and said, "Could you help me up? My legs are numb."

Luo Yuan naturally looked at her thighs and noticed that the posture she was sitting in was inappropriate. Her dress had accidentally risen up, exposing her fair buttocks. Luo Yuan had just gone through a series of fights and he was still pumped from the killing experience. He became braver and naturally touched her buttock after failing to resist such a seductive sight.

"What the hell are you doing?" Zhao Yali shouted out, shocked when Luo Yuan grabbed her butt.

He then pulled her up from the ground.

"You jerk! Your mind is just full of porn!" Zhao Yali scolded him madly. She got up from the ground and pushed Luo Yuan's hand away.

"Why didn't you wear any underwear? It's normal for a healthy guy to react this way!" he explained innocently. He wondered why women were so weird. Last night she was desperately asking for it, but today she was totally different, and he wasn't even allowed to touch her.

Zhao Yali's face blushed red and she said, "You shouldn't do that even if I'm not wearing any underwear! You're not my boyfriend!" Luo Yuan remained silent. Zhao Yali became more furious and kicked his leg. She then walked away angrily and said, "I'm leaving, you should go home!"

However, she slowed down when she saw the dead bodies.

"There is still a long way to go and you might be in danger, I'll be worried if you go alone," Luo Yuan said.

"Just leave me alone! Even if you arrive at my house, I'll still kick you out!" Zhao Yali threatened.

"Do you really need to do this? I'm just trying to help you." Luo Yuan sighed and then added angrily, "Fine, I'll go home. Since you're so mad and don't want to see me, I'll just leave. I shouldn't have come here in the first place!" He turned around and walked away without looking back.

Zhao Yali turned around and seeing Luo Yuan walking away, she immediately felt depressed. She waited for a while but he was still walking away from her. Certain that he won't come back, she squatted down and started crying the tears she had held in for a long time.

It was becoming difficult to breathe when she heard, "Aren't you an adult? Still crying?"

She sobbed even louder when she heard his voice and cried out, "Don't bother me! Why didn't you go home? Why did you come back?"

"I was joking, my dear, and I recalled there is a gun somewhere in the area. I was trying to get it," Luo Yuan explained. He wouldn't just let her go home alone even if there was no mission to complete.

Zhao Yali stopped crying once she heard his explanation. She quickly got up from the ground and asked, "Are you crazy? Why would you take the gun? Throw it away, we might get arrested if the police finds out!"

Luo Yuan felt touched and said, "The gun is for you, you might be able to use it in the future. And don't worry about the police, they are too busy for such small things. If even bullies can get a gun now, there must be more people out there who own guns. As long as you keep it properly, it should be fine."

But Zhao Yali still rejected anxiously, "Why would I need it? It's

dangerous and my parents might be frightened!”

“The world is chaotic right now and it will be worse in the future. Who knows what is going to happen tomorrow? It will be safer if you have a gun for protection. Even if you bump into bullies in the future, you will be able scare them away with a gun.”

Zhao Yali changed her mind as she remembered all the many horrible and scary experiences she had gone through recently. She was no longer afraid of the gun. "But I don't know how to fire," she said softly.

"I've learned from a police once, I'll teach you later," Luo Yuan told her with a smile.

Zhao Yali got mad again when she saw Luo Yuan smile. "Don't even begin to think I'll forgive you. The incident last night was a mistake! If you touch me again, I'll... I'll..." She couldn't think of a word strong enough to threaten him.

The scent of blood was attracting many different mutated animals. There were also a few dark shadows lingering in the sky. It was obvious more would come later. It was good in a way, though, since the chance of Luo Yuan getting arrested would become that much slimmer.

He looked around and then said, "Alright, alright. This place is not safe anymore, we should leave now." He then grabbed her hand and ran.

Chapter 20: Gigantic Dog

Zhao Yali was physically weak so they had to stop several times for rest along the way. Fortunately, they didn't encounter any more dangerous circumstances.

Finally, they arrived at Zhao Village and Zhao Yali looked calmed by it. "This is my alma mater, I used to study here. There used to be many boys swimming in the river beside my school, but it seems to have been long abandoned now," Zhao Yali introduced and sighed.

A woman walked toward them from the opposite direction and greeted Zhao Yali, "Hi, Lili, you're back?" She then looked at Luo Yuan and asked, "Is this your boyfriend?"

Zhao Yali felt awkward and said, "Oh, no. He just helped me come here."

The woman didn't seem convinced and continued, "Why not? He looks good and you were obedient since young. But I can't talk much now. I'm sure your parents are waiting for you at home. You should go see them. Remember to come to my place for a meal with your friend tomorrow!"

"Oh, I think he will be fine. He's leaving today." Zhao Yali quickly rejected.

"Oh dear, why don't you stay here for a few days?" the woman asked. She didn't seem to believe Zhao Yali again.

When she was gone, Zhao Yali explained timidly, "I'm sorry, she is one of my extended family members. She is used to being very passionate. I hope she didn't bother you too much."

"Don't worry," Luo Yuan replied.

This village gave him the feeling of peace and quiet. The villagers looked friendly. like people did prior to the recent happenings. However, that didn't seem to be normal, and he wasn't sure if it was real. For some reason, he felt that the area wasn't completely safe. But finally, they arrived in front of a small old house after the long journey.

“Beep!”

“Mission completed!”

“Comment: Excellent.”

“Basic experience reward: 400”

“Comment reward: +200”

Luo Yuan immediately felt relieved and free when he heard that familiar sound.

“Please remain silent later to avoid any misunderstandings. And if my dad asks you whether you have a girlfriend, please say yes,” Zhao Yali told him hastily in a depressed tone of voice.

“Alright, I got it. I promise I won’t talk nonsense,” Luo Yuan easily agreed.

Zhao Yali felt relieved and knocked on the door with excitement. “Mom! Mom! I’m back!”

“Coming, I’m coming!” They could hear the footsteps of Zhao Yali’s mother rushing to the door. The grill was opened, and a woman with an apron walked out from the house. She hugged Zhao Yali, and both of them shed tears of joys.

Luo Yuan noticed how alike the two looked. He was standing aside, uneasy. Since his parents had passed away in the accident, he hadn’t seen this kind of a heart-warming scene. After a while, Zhao Yali’s mother wiped away the tears and let go of her daughter. She looked at Luo Yuan and nodded, saying, “Oh dear, you’re Lili’s friend right? Come in, please. Why don’t you introduce him?”

It was difficult not to talk about Luo Yuan’s appearance. He was tall and handsome. Besides that, he had become more stable and mature after the period of training and fighting. Right now, he could be considered as an outstanding person.

Zhao Yali’s eyes were teary as she stared at Luo Yuan for a

second, then she replied to her mother, “Nothing much to introduce, just a normal friend. But Mom, where’s daddy?”

Her mother nagged at her, “How could you say that?” She turned to face Luo Yuan. “I hope you don’t mind. Please come in.” She quickly turned back to her daughter. “Lili, can you please help me make some tea?”

"It alright, ma'am. My name is Luo Yuan, but you can just call me Yuan. I'll help myself, don't worry. I really appreciate it," Luo Yuan said.

"Alright, alright! Lili, can you please come and talk with Luo Yuan? Your dad and Xiao Huang have went to the farm since he said he wanted to prepare some meat for you. They will be back soon," Zhao Yali’s mother said happily while looking at Luo Yuan.

Zhao Yali was shocked and her complexion paled instantly. “Oh no, mom! How could you let him go alone? It’s very dangerous outside! I’ll go find him!”

She looked at Luo Yuan with eyes begging for help, and he nodded.

However, her mother wasn’t worried at all and said, "Don't worry, my girl, he has Lao Huang. She is amazing, none of the other animals can beat her. You will be shocked when you see her later."

Luo Yuan's facial expression changed instantly. "Is that a mutated animal again?" he wondered.

Zhao Yali was sitting in the living room together with Luo Yuan when they heard someone trying to unlock the padlock outside the grill. "Must be my dad!" Zhao Yali stood up when she heard the sound.

A gigantic animal which was nearly two meters in height squeezed into the house once the door was opened. It was wagging its tail happily, but the feature that attracted more attention was an extraordinary flaming red fluffy fur. It was moving up and down, following the animal's jumps. The fur was red, and it looked like a burning flame.

The animal's limbs were very strong and brought out a feeling of power. Even if a person was to only look from afar, they would feel pressured. But strangely, there was a chain tied around the dog's neck, and the far end of it was held by a man. Yet based on the animal's body size and energy, it could probably easily break the chain if it used any strength.

Zhao Yali was shocked and stood up in fear. She didn't feel comfortable looking at this gigantic dog as she found it unreal.

Luo Yuan's body tensed, and he looked very serious as though he had bumped into a very powerful enemy. His hand naturally traveled to his knife just like at the time when he was about to fight with the big snake.

Suddenly, a man with a snakeskin backpack came in holding the chain in his hand. The man looked about to be about 50 years old. "Oh, my dear! You're finally home! Were you shocked?" the man asked her.

"Is this Lao Huang?" Zhao Yali asked.

The gigantic dog kept wagging her tail and made some sounds to show how happy she was when she saw Zhao Yali. She did not rush to Zhao Yali but turned around to look at her father. He scolded the dog and she whined but allowed herself to be chained beside a big tree. Through all that time, she kept on looking at Zhao Yali while whining.

Luo Yuan quickly stepped forward to shake his hand when he saw Zhao Yali's father walking toward him. "Hi, I'm Luo Yuan. How are you?"

Zhao Yali's father looked at Luo Yuan and said, "You're Lili's friend? Don't be afraid, the dog doesn't bite and she is very smart. We usually let her go around the house." He noticed Luo Yuan's knife hung by his waist and asked, "Were you alright on the way home?"

Although Zhao Yali's father dressed very plainly, he was not just a normal farmer. He spoke in a very fluent and accurate Mandarin. He must have gone through something different before settling here.

"Oh, don't worry. Just some small problems, it was manageable.

Luckily, I had a knife,” Luo Yuan replied, smiling.

However, Zhao Yali’s father had already noticed a few tiny blood stains on his daughter's dress, and he could understand the risky and dangerous experiences behind the simple description from Luo Yuan. He looked a bit scared and worried. "It seems everything is worsening faster than what we expected. I thought the city would be safer, otherwise, I'd have waited for her at the station. I'm so grateful that you were there for her along the way. I can't imagine what would have happened otherwise."

“You’re very welcome, uncle. Yali used to help me a lot; she is just like my sister. I only did what I had to,” Luo Yuan replied respectfully.

Zhao Yali stood aside with a mad face. “Is there any younger brother who will get on top of the sister?” she wondered in her mind.

Her father continued speaking, “Alright, then I won’t mention it anymore. I wanted her to come back in the first place, but I thought the city center would be safer than the villages. It's good that she's back now, at least we have food here. Besides that, her mom will no longer need to worry about her and nag me every day."

Suddenly, Zhao Yali’s mother called her father from the kitchen. He smiled and said, "Oh dear, please take a seat first. I need to help her mom. Let's drink together over dinner."

Luo Yuan quickly replied, "Sure! Thanks for helping." After he went into the kitchen, Luo Yuan asked Zhao Yali, "How was my performance?"

Zhao Yali stared at him and said, "Normal." A moment later, she asked Luo Yuan, "When are you leaving?"

"I've never seen people like who would be so mean to someone who's helped them so much. Don't you think it would be nice to offer me a dinner as a return before I leave? I'm starving," Luo Yuan told her. Suddenly, he put his palm on his forehead as if he was recalling something important and said, "Oh! Don't you plan to get yourself some panties?"

"You pervert!! Your mind is all about pornography!" Zhao Yali was mad and blushed. She was trying to run up to the first floor when Luo Yuan stopped her and passed the gun to her, "Please hide it properly."

Zhao Yali took the gun carefully and quickly checked the surroundings, then ran up. Luo Yuan smiled and walked out of the living room. He looked at the gigantic dog. She was lazily lying on the floor, and to Luo Yuan's amazement, she was still taller than half a meter. Her ears moved a little and straightened instantly when she became aware of people approaching her. She opened her eyes slightly and then closed them again. Luo Yuan noticed they were light blue and clear, just like crystals.

Luo Yuan stepped a bit closer to her and then stopped. This dog wasn't like those mutated rats. Even though Zhao Yali's father described her as a gentle and smart dog, he wouldn't take the risk

of challenging her. If he did, he would be thrown away five to six meters by a simple hit, since the size of the dog was really beyond imagination. Luo Yuan would receive some minor injuries even if he was confident enough to kill her. Yet, it was necessary to kill her. He noticed a few red animal hairs on the floor which were about 20 cm in length. He picked one up and used his identification power.

“Fur from a mutated gigantic dog.”

“Function: Resource”

“Rarity: Light Blue”

“Weight: 0.01kg”

“Comment: This is a fur from a mutated dog that consists of a small power of fire.”

“It’s real!” Luo Yuan was shocked but he proved his own speculation. Zhao Yali was going to be safe here.

Luo Yuan had no idea what was the factor that controlled the mutating speed since he realized that some animals were mutating faster than the others.

Most of the mutated animals were categorized in Grade White,

and there were just a few animals classified in Grade Blue. Those graded as blue were usually super rare and were as valuable as the feather of a phoenix or the horn of a Chinese unicorn. However, Luo Yuan had seen two of these rare animals so far: the big snake and the gigantic dog in front of him. Each of them could be the king of their particular area. Perhaps, there was also a huge one in the rat community.

Thankfully, they hadn't bumped into it.

Anyway, it was no wonder that the village looked extraordinary peaceful. As the infrastructure and agriculture in the villages got more sophisticated, cows became expelled from the farms. There was no reason for the villagers to be worried, especially since the dog was considered the big animal of the surrounding area and was enough to scare away the smaller mutated animals. Most importantly, she had undergone the evolution to light blue grade which was sufficient to protect the villagers.

He recalled the couple who had killed their dog in the Choo Village and felt they were stupid as they didn't know that a dog was always loyal to its owners as long as they didn't abuse it. Even if the dog mutated, it would not change its loyalty. Also, even if the dog was only graded as White, that was sufficient to fight off most of the threats right now. Though, it was extremely expensive to rear one if the dog didn't know how to find its own food.

"Oh, but what is this power of fire?" Luo Yuan noticed about the comments about the fur and wondered what it could be. "Does that mean this dog can spit fire?" He rubbed the fur a few times but didn't feel anything unusual. He then pulled the fur but it didn't

tear, so he increased his strength and pulled again. Only then it finally tore into two pieces. The fur looked normal but it was actually very strong, even stronger than some wires.

“What are you doing here?” Zhao Yali suddenly asked from behind him.

Luo Yuan turned around and saw Zhao Yali had changed into a long light green dress that brought out the fairness of her skin. She had also put on some light makeup which made her look even more charming.

“I’m studying her fur to see what I could learn about it.”

“Such a waste that you didn’t work as a biologist. Oh, her fur is so long! It used to be yellow but now it became red!” Zhao Yali said, grabbing the fur from Luo Yuan.

“You’re getting harsher now!” Luo Yuan noted, getting up from the ground. He looked at the gigantic dog which had stood up and was now wagging her tail while looking at Zhao Yali. “Why don’t you play with her? It would be great if you could help me get a few of her hairs, the fur on her body looks darker,” Luo Yuan said.

“I’m scared,” Zhao Yali muttered, looking at the dog. She seemed to be willing to try but was still hesitating since the dog’s size was truly scary.

“She won’t bite you. Remember your dad. He said she has

mutated and become very smart, that means she won't do anything that might be dangerous to you. But she will be depressed and disappointed if you just keep standing here."

Based on her actions and performances, the dog was quite intelligent. It could be compared to an 8-years-old kid. If Zhao Yali couldn't overcome her fear, the dog would begin to keep a distance from her and eventually end up hurting her.

"Alright, I'll try. But you don't go too far away," Zhao Yali said with a nod. She would have been feeling numb and looked deathly pale if this was any other animal than the one it was. However, it was a home dog and she was gentle enough to make Zhao Yali feel relieved.

Zhao Yali felt boosted when she saw Luo Yuan nodding. She slowly walked toward the dog, while her heart beat vigorously and her palms sweated continuously. The dog wagged her tail at a faster pace when she saw her master coming nearer to her. She was so excited and kept squatting and standing up, but did not rush forward.

Finally, she barked a few times and then lied down on the floor. Rolling over, she exposed her soft belly. Luo Yuan took a look and realized it was a female dog.

Zhao Yali suddenly felt familiar and overcame her fear. She walked quickly toward the dog and bent down to rub its belly. The dog kept whining in joy and she rubbed her furry head against Zhao Yali's legs with some saliva dripping out at the edge of her mouth. Perhaps she had undergone some training before since she

was quite good at controlling her strength.

Zhao Yali chuckled and said, “Good girl!” She then turned to Luo Yuan who was standing nearby, afraid of getting closer, and said, “If you bully me again, I’ll ask Lao Huang to bite you!” The dog’s ears twitched immediately and she raised her eyelids. It seemed like she was thinking of standing up.

Luo Yuan was sweating and whispered to Zhao Yali, “Can you please stop joking? When did I bully you?”

Zhao Yali shyly said, “You know better!”

Zhao Yali’s mother came out from the kitchen with an apron tied around her waist and talked to both of them, “Lili, come with your friend for dinner.”

“Alright!” Zhao Yali replied. She then patted the dog's head and kicked Luo Yuan once when passing by.

The dinner was good with a big pot of an eel, frogs, and quail eggs. There were also a few plates of vegetables and some hard liquor, homemade and a bottle of Chinese traditional. Zhao Yali’s parents were very nice and kept putting food on Luo Yuan’s plate and pouring liquor into his bowl.

The amount was overwhelming for Luo Yuan. He had drank three bowls of hard liquor even though he tried to reject it. Luckily, he was quite good at drinking and his body was also fitter

compared to others'. He only felt a slight headache even after drinking so much.

They continued to chit chat for a while after the dinner. Luo Yuan asked to leave by using the excuse of having some pending tasks in Donghu city. Zhao Yali's parents asked him to stay overnight but Luo Yuan insisted on leaving. They then asked Zhao Yali to send him out.

After the two left the room, Zhao Yali's mother asked while cleaning the dining table, "What do you think of this man?"

"Very stable and mature, has good manners. I kind of like him but I don't think Lili wants anyone now. As you know Weiqiang has just passed away recently. I think we should just go with the flow," Zhao Yali's father replied and then grabbed a cigarette and began to smoke.

"You're always like this, not paying enough attention to the details. Unlike you, I understand our daughter." Apparently, she didn't believe that Luo Yuan was just normal friend. She continued, "She used to behave like this when she brought Weiqiang over. Apparently, they had been going out for a while already but were still pretending not to. While today I saw her peeping at Luo Yuan when we were having dinner."

"Oh dear! You have such keen eyes! I almost got tricked by her! But we don't know whether the man has noticed it or not." Zhao Yali's father laughed.

“Can’t you see that he purposely went out of his way to send our daughter home even it’s so far from his original goal? Does that say nothing to you?” Zhao Yali’s mother asked.

“I think we should just leave it to the both of them.” Zhao Yali’s father continued to smoke and sighed. “The world is only getting more terrible. There hasn’t been any electricity for a week or more already. I’ve heard that there was a big turmoil in Zhang Village a few days ago, and a few people had suddenly died. Our village is considered better than the rest but still... Now they will be living separately, so who knows whether they will even see each other again or not.”

Zhao Yali’s mother looked worried and slowly sat down, putting the tablecloth aside.

Chapter 21: The Landfill

Luo Yuan and Zhao Yali were leisurely walking along the street without saying a word.

After some time, Zhao Yali couldn't take it anymore and said, "Don't you have anything to say to me?"

Luo Yuan thought for a while and said drily, "Yes, please do take care of yourself."

This man could always incite anger and hatred in others. Luo Yuan really wanted to beat him up, but sadly was unable to.

"And?" Zhao Yali said forcefully while biting her lip. It seemed that she wanted to take her revenge.

Luo Yuan was annoyed. He looked at Zhao Yali queerly and asked, "What do you want me to say?"

Zhao Yali sighed in her heart. "Oh yes, what to say? What answer do I want? Our relationship was simply that of housemates, or just a one night stand. Furthermore, we are going to depart soon and may not see each other again. Isn't it meaningless to hang on?"

They walked in silence, neither saying anything after that.

The weather was getting colder — a humid and cool wind blew

past them. Then, the bean-sized raindrops poured down. And soon, it was raining cats and dogs.

Luo Yuan took off his T-shirt and used it to cover Zhao Yali's head. "Let's hide somewhere. This rain is too heavy."

"Let's go to the factory nearby." Zhao Yali looked at the shirt above her head and felt warm.

"Okay!"

It was an old shabby factory. It seemed to have been shut down for a long time as it had no signboard and the rusty electric sliding door at the entrance was opened widely.

They quickly ran into the factory. Nevertheless, they were both soaked to the skin.

The light green dress was attached to Zhao Yali's body, making its outline more obvious and seductive.

Maybe it was because they were somewhere in a hidden place, or maybe because they thought they might not meet again, but the flame of concupiscence ignited and burned fiercely. Neither of them could have said who started first but their bodies were soon stuck together. They were kissing, gasping and panting. Their skins rubbed against each other, heating up the fire even more.

The storm outside completely covered the sounds made by the

two.

The rain gradually ceased.

Zhao Yali snuggled up to Luo Yuan. Her dress was in an utter mess.

“Will we meet again?” she asked softly.

“Of course we will!” Luo Yuan comforted her.

“But was that really so?” The world was getting more chaotic each day, and nobody could say anything about their future as the mutated animals continued to evolve. Luo Yuan was uncertain. Maybe with the advanced technology that humanity had, they might win eventually. But by that time, the world would most likely be severely damaged, and the air thick with smoke.

Anyway, it all came down to an individual’s luck. During such a disaster, one may only struggle and hope.

When the rain stopped, Luo Yuan left.

Zhao Yali watched him walking away and gradually becoming a small dot. Then, she could no longer hold back her tears from dripping down her cheeks.

She didn't know why, since it was only for a short period of time

she had known him, but Luo Yuan had settled deep within her heart. Perhaps it was because Luo Yuan had always comforted her when she was alone, helpless. Or maybe it had to do with the peace and security she felt around him. Yet still, it could be simply because they used to get entangled sexually together.

Those feelings were like a firing hot volcano, violently erupting and then forced to an abrupt-end now that he was gone.

Luo Yuan walked to the highway. The mountain pass seemed to have been opened up, and there were already a few cars passing by.

He waited for half an hour until an empty public bus finally came. He boarded it, and went to sit at the back.

As the bus passed through the incident point, he saw that the two buses which had broken down were no longer there. Only the leftover blood stains showed that an incident had happened there.

Yushui City was still in depression and there was no sign of revitalization at all. Panic was still pervading the whole city.

Luo Yuan managed to buy a train ticket and check in his Zhanmadao. He turned back, looking at the city for the last time, and without hesitation boarded the train back to Donghu City.

The landfill at the east gate was stinky and with flowing sewage water. The place was overcrowded with shabby old shacks and some simple iron shielded rooms. It was an obvious contrast to the

beautiful and new high rise buildings nearby.

Here was the slums of the city. People normally avoided to come to this place.

However, it gradually became lively.

Fifteen days after Luo Yuan had come back to Donghu City, the condition at the city hadn't improved but deteriorated instead. The army and police were quite often on the streets, and armored vehicles could be seen occasionally too.

Fuel such as gas and diesel had become part of army supplies and, thus, had been taken over completely. Other than some cars from the government or the army, there were barely any other on the road.

Many businesses were closing down after being affected by increasing bills and the lack of raw materials, transportation, and electricity. As the supplies were limited, many people started to make a living by themselves. In addition, the limited amount and the soaring prices of meat and food had made some people who thought they had some fighting skills start to join hunting groups.

The landfill was a city within a city where the living organisms gathered together. For them, it was a huge storehouse with an inexhaustible food supply. Of course, that attracted a lot of cats, dogs and rats.

However, after a few encircling and suppressing moves by the army, the larger sized dangerous animals such as stray dogs could barely be seen. Only some of the elusive rats could be found.

Nonetheless, it was quite dangerous there. Those rats were the size of a normal cat, very aggressive and quite clever. They always appeared in groups and a single bite of theirs would make a bloody hole in the victim's body.

Besides that, four to five rats were enough to kill a strong adult. Thus, hunters were usually hunting in groups of three to five or even more than eleven people in a team. It was rare to see an individual hunter like Luo Yuan.

He was wearing army boots, coarse jeans and a thin jacket to cover the snake scale bullet vest. He held the Zhanmadao in his right hand and walked toward the landfill.

Luo Yuan came here often and his fighting ability was astonishing. Therefore, many knew this great man and surrounded him when he came.

“Brother Luo, can you please be merciful and share some meat with me? My family hasn't eaten meat for a few days already, and my kids are craving it. Just a leg of a rat is enough, and I'll pay for it. It's alright if you want two or five hundred for it,” a depressed middle-aged man said, forcefully squeezing into the circle.

Because of the presence of the supply and demand relationship, the landfill had become a lively market area. Every day, many were

waiting to deal with the successful hunters. But it was very rare to have hunters like Luo Yuan who would receive bookings before they even went out to hunt. Throughout the landfill, there were only a few people or teams capable of something like that. And they were mostly great people, with many of them having guns.

It was now an open secret of how to purchase a gun. As long as one had some connections, he could easily get one. However, most were handguns, and it was rare to see the more powerful weapons.

“The money today is greatly inflating. I’ve got money but I can’t buy anything, so what’s the use of it?” one fat guy in a suit said scornfully. “I want to change with food. Five catties of food to a one catty of meat, and I’ll change all of them, face-to-face. It’ll be in the open.”

When the people took a look, there were four strong men with weapons standing alertly, watching over more than ten bags of fifty catties of food. The two of them even had guns at their waists.

Someone knew the speaker and said with a grin, “GM Xie, why didn’t you continue with your software company but started trading instead? Aren’t you moving backward?”

“Software Company? So what? What’s a big business? A business which can provide you food like this is the current largest business!” Xie Qifeng didn't mind exposing his business plan as there were already a large number of such businessmen. Therefore, it didn't matter if there were more people competing. Furthermore, one needed capital and social networks to start a business.

“I don’t need food nor money yet, I just need some gas. Do you have any sources?” Luo Yuan asked.

As the number of people increased at this landfill, it was becoming more difficult to hunt. He needed to spend a lot of time daily to look for prey. Thus, it was one of the reasons why he needed gas.

Since he knew the meat of mutated animals had some special effects, he tried to target only blue-level mutated organisms. However, the defensive power of Donghu City was strong, and the blue-level organisms were instantly killed by the army. In order to get some for himself, he had to go elsewhere.

He managed to get a car but couldn't get gas.

“Brother Luo, you know that gas is now a controlled product. As the sea route was blocked, the crude oil can no longer be sent through there. It’s still possible via land, but the transportation isn’t easy. We should now save gas as much as possible. Well, I’ve got some left at home, but what’s the price?” Fatty Xie used to have a company, so of course, he had ways to get even controlled supplies. As soon as he started talking about business, the man’s eyes began glowing shrewdly.

Luo Yuan grinned. “As long as you can get gas, the price is up to you.”

Fatty Xie was moved and knew this was his chance to earn more,

but soon he stopped himself from being too greedy. This was because many people might still have gas as they could get some from their cars, though it was precious. Furthermore, this guy wasn't someone easy to bully. If Fatty Xie cheated him today, he might seek revenge tomorrow. And with today's collapsing order, such a person shouldn't be offended.

“Since Brother Luo is such a straightforward man, I'll not ask for a preposterous price either. Let it be fair enough, ten catties of meat per liter. You may ask around for the price of gas in the black market, and you'll learn this is definitely a bargain,” Fatty Xie said straightforwardly, patting his chest.

“It depends, will you deal with mutated rats?” Luo Yuan said.

“Oh brother Luo, you are ready to do it, right? Sure, I will make a phone call and get somebody to send the gas here!” Fatty Xie said brightly.

The surrounding people knew that they no longer had any chance and, thus, faded away quickly. Soon, another hunter team came, and these people went to surround them.

The deal was done. Luo Yuan walked to the stall nearby, bought a bottle of beer and chose a relatively clean rock to squat on. It was still evening, the sky not completely dark yet. So it wasn't the best hunting time.

Though mutated rats came out during the day, they were most active during the night. Occasionally, the hunters might be lucky

to meet some larger group in one of the smaller areas and receive great rewards for it. However, it was also the most dangerous time and it was normal to have more than ten people die.

During the troubled time, human lives were not precious. Because of the living pressure, the landfill kept on attracting many risk-takers.

As the day quickly darkened, the area was soon overcrowded. With the squeaking sounds coming from deep in the landfill, some newcomers became nervous and breathed heavily.

The crowd started to light up their torches, and the surroundings became brighter.

Luo Yuan didn't prepare any torches as his eyesight was pretty good and his senses keen. With only some weak moonlight, he could roughly recognize the landscape, and it didn't have a lot of effect on his fights. Instead, he felt that a torch might interfere during a battle.

He looked up at the sky and saw a full moon hanging, covering the ground with a layer of silvery light. It was a good day to hunt.

As the night got darker, the people started to move toward the landfill.

Soon, there was a scream of terror, and then a gunshot. The smell of blood started to fill the air.

The landfill had once more become the location of war — the war between men and rats.

Luo Yuan continued to sit for a little longer, drank the last mouthful of beer, then simply threw the bottle away and stood up.

Such incidents occurred every day and he had already gotten used to it.

However, it was somehow different. The war had started too fast and the screaming was obviously more common than the previous times. Soon, there was a commotion. Some people ran back with terrified looks on their faces; most of them newcomers.

Then, Luo Yuan quickly walked to the front.

“Brother Luo Yuan, you came too?” a tall youth suddenly called Luo Yuan.

“Yes, what’s happening? Why are all these people leaving?” Luo Yuan knew this guy, he was known as Chen Haiyan, a ladylike name. Like him, he was an individualist. He should have learned fighting before, and was good with a knife. He was strong and if Luo Yuan wasn't agile, he might not be his opponent. But they just knew each other from sight.

“We’ve met a large group of rats. As soon as we started fighting, many had already died. And I heard that somebody saw a large

guy,” Chen Haiyan summed up.

“Oh, it was the large group of rats!” Luo Yuan was moved. “Do you mean that the big guy was the king of the rats?”

“Possibly. If it’s not, then these people won’t leave. You should know that having this large group of rats tonight is a great opportunity. I’d bet on it, we’ll earn more than enough for four to five days.” Chen Haiyan looked at this landfill filled with screams and licked his dry lips. “I heard that the price of this king of rats, the leader-level organism, is now very high. Normally when they appear, they are killed by the army and, thus, this is our only chance. I can’t do it alone, shall we form a team and ***?”

“Has the good effects of consuming mutated animals have been made known to everyone? But it’s not surprising after all. With the strong research abilities that the government has, such obvious effects would quickly become known to the public too. Even the hunters here must know a lot about it,” Luo Yuan thought.

He had been ready to kill blue-level organism for some time now, so how could he give up this opportunity? When he decided on it, a message came into his mind.

“Optional mission, e-level mission: hunt down and kill the king of the rats in three days. You have to kill it on your own. Mission failed if it is killed by others (Accept/Decline).”

“e-level mission, what the hell?” Luo Yuan was shocked and scolded himself.

It was his first time receiving an e-level mission. Even when he killed that giant snake, it was only an f+ level while this mission was e-.

Luo Yuan hesitated for a while, but then thought about the difficulty to upgrade and grinding his teeth accepted. It was just a one level difference! Also, just like what Chen Haiyan had said, it was the only chance. He might need to wait for a long time until he received another e-level mission. Besides, with the two light-blue equipments, he didn't believe that he would be killed by that rat.

“Okay, let’s separate and call some trustable people over, then we can gather here,” said Luo Yuan, grinding his teeth.

“Alright!” Chen Haiyan nodded and left speedily.

Since Luo Yuan had been here for so long, he had to know some people. Soon, he found five.

These five people were from a team. They used to be security guards for some company, and they were also retired soldiers. They were very united and always helped each other, thus, becoming a relatively strong team at this landfill. Luo Yuan had saved their life once during one large group of rats’ attack, so they were quite close.

Soon, Chen Haiyan came back with another group of people. They kind of knew each other as they were quite famous. Other than the individualist Qian Dakui, there was a noticeable group of

three.

Those three had a gun each, but no other weapons. Their shooting skills were very accurate and their leader was a middle aged man called boss Zhou. It was said that he used to be in a gang, and was very stubborn, intractable and emotional. He would kill anyone who disagreed with him. Therefore, none dared to look for trouble with him.

Luo Yuan slightly raised his eyebrow, feeling somewhat uneasy with this cooperation.

The screams of terror kept coming from the landfill, and more people were retracting!

“Everyone should know the others. With limited time, I will cut it short.” Chen Haiyan looked toward the noisy area in the far distance and said quickly, “You should know the price of the king of rats, and I believe that many are targeting it.”

“Stop talking about this nonsense. Let’s talk about dividing the prize to prevent misunderstandings later,” Qian Dakui said, interrupting. He was tall and strong, and his height was about two meters. He held a big hacking knife in one hand and a shield of one meter height in the other. The shield was apparently customized as there were seven sharp blades welded onto it. One hit by such a shield, and one may soon die.

Chen Haiyan looked at him, anger passing over his eyes for a second. He then said, “Talking about dividing, let me clarify first,

this is our first cooperation and we don't know much about each other yet. In order to avoid misunderstandings, I would suggest that we divide evenly and the person who kills the king of rats will have two portions. If there're no other questions, we will start now to prevent the king of rats from being killed by others and us receiving nothing."

None disagreed as it was a team formed at the last minute. As they didn't know each other much, such division was more suitable.

"We accept even division, but let me clarify first, if someone doesn't work for it, he'll be out," Boss Zhou said, looking at everyone.

"Okay, let it be so," Qian Dakui agreed.

Luo Yuan also nodded in agreement.

The people brought in by Luo Yuan, they had naturally let him become their leader.

The operation had gathered a total of 11 people. Though they looked like a team, they were not of one body, and they didn't have any teamwork. However, they were all considered as strong men at the landfill. Once they walked into the landfill, they quickly went forward.

Small sized mutated rats couldn't hinder their steps as they were

killed the moment they got in the way.

Since the target was the king of rats, nobody picked up the normal mutated rats in order not to burden themselves. When some people saw that they might get some advantages, they followed after them. Soon, the team expanded like a rolling snowball.

Chapter 22: A Sudden Change

“It’s good to have this cannon-fodder,” the leader of the five said to Luo Yan while chopping down an escaping mutated rat’s head with a Kukri. The man was called Huang Yaoguang and he used to be a security team’s leader for a company. A few days after the company was closed down, he gathered some of his team members and started to stay at the landfill. If it wasn’t for Luo Yuan, who saved them during the last meeting with a large group of rats, they would have become bones already. Thus, he and his group had been following Luo Yuan tightly as soon as they departed.

“This crowd will disappear the moment there’s danger!” Luo Yuan said while looking into the far distance. The front was vague. Even though many people had left, there were still over a thousand or so gathered in the few square kilometers of landfill.

The group of rats was very large in size, and it was probably the largest group within the last two weeks. The deeper they went, the more frequent the fighting became, and more corpses could be found on the floor. Occasionally, some mutated rats could be seen chewing on the corpses while the intestines and inner organs were spread out on the floor. A mixture of smell of blood and the unique stink of the landfill had formed an odd, nausea inducing smell.

“Look, what’s that?” somebody in the front suddenly shouted out. The crowd looked in that direction and saw a piece of grey blanket coming over from about a hundred meters away. Then there were gunshots, and the fighting started. Some ran desperately back while more people ran forward it. The atmosphere became boisterous.

That wasn't a blanket but a large group of mutated rats which had gathered together. They were covering a large area of more than a hundred meters and were moving forward like a big wave.

“Let's go, the king of rats must be there,” Chen Haiyan shouted. He ran forward soon after finishing his sentence. The others increased their speed as well and went to the frontline. When they saw what was happening, they gasped in astonishment.

It was over-crowded with rats, they even covered the whole rubbish mountain area. Though they saw only parts of them, there were already thousands of them. If Luo Yuan hadn't been surrounded by more than a hundred people who were continuously fighting, and many more who were still coming to join in, he would have already given up.

“Kill!” Chen Haiyan shouted and led their team into the fight. With only a few swipes of his knife, he had already killed some rats. As he moved around with his clever footwork and body movement, he hacked, pricked, chopped, swabbed, stripped, spread, pulled, cut and used other knife techniques. The rats couldn't get close to him at all.

“Sir Luo, what shall we do?” As Huang Yaoguang and his team weren't called in by Chen Haiyan and they also admired Luo Yuan, they didn't attack immediately but instead asked Luo Yuan as to what to do.

“It's just some rats, so they're insufficient to pose us a real threat.

You guys stand behind and help me stop them from both sides.” Luo Yuan felt slightly excited after he saw Chen Haiyan’s performance.

“Okay, we’ll do it. Unless they step through our dead bodies, we won’t let a single rat escape,” Huang Yaoguang promised immediately because he knew that this move would reduce the pressure on them. Luo Yuan nodded and walked forward with his knife ready.

After a long period of training, his knife skill had upgraded to 13-points and, thus, his ability was much stronger when compared to the time when he’d went to Yushui City. The knife in his hand was like a part of his body, which allowed him to control it easily. His knife’s blade was glowing radiantly and before the rats managed to get anywhere near him, their heads were already removed, fresh blood spattering the ground.

Compared to the knife skill of Chen Haiyan, he didn't have too many techniques but each one he did have were very accurate and precise. The only specialty he had was speed. His hacking was so fast that a normal person could barely see his movements. Thus, Huang Yaoguang and the others who were following him had little to do.

Other than Luo Yuan and Chen Haiyan, that middle-aged man, Qian Dakui, was an eye catcher too. He roared, bent his body, held his shield up and rushed recklessly into a group of rats. He was very strong and together with his shield, which had many sharp blades welded-on, he knocked down all the rats before him. All of them were either dead or badly mutilated.

After rushing for a few meters, he stopped, spun his shield around his body and knocked down some mutated rats trying to attack from his sides. Then, he took out his knife and chopped continuously. Though his knife skill wasn't as good as either Luo Yuan's and Chen Haiyan's but he could easily protect himself from the attacking rats.

Boss Zhou and his two subordinates were staying behind and only shot occasionally to kill the escaping rats. To them, each bullet was precious and, thus, they couldn't kill unscrupulously like the rest. Besides that, they hadn't brought many bullets with them, so they could only use them during a crucial moment.

As the crowd moved forward, corpses were left behind. There were corpses of both mutated rats and men, but mostly the rats. After about ten minutes, the group had moved about a few hundred meters and the number of people following them had also increased to more than a thousand. The size of the rats' group had gradually become smaller.

Suddenly, there was a growling sound coming from afar. It didn't sound like a rat but more like the roaring of a ferocious beast. Upon hearing it, the mutated rats started to retreat like a tide water.

“Oh no! The king of rats is escaping. If we lose this chance, the beast will be more difficult to kill next time!” Luo Yuan shouted out, rolling his eyes. If the king of rats managed to escape, he would fail his mission.

“Go after it! We must not let it run away.” The crowd heard it and became excited. But the people were soon divided, only about a hundred chased after while the rest decided to remain behind. After all, not everyone was ambitious. Most of the people came here just to earn something without taking too high of a risk. With so many corpses of mutated rats lying about, it was sufficient for them to live a stable life for a while.

After a few minutes, a giant rat was seen. Perhaps it was the reflection of the moonlight or because of its fur characteristic, it looked silvery white. Its body was about one and half meters long and looked smoother than those of normal rats. Its slender tail was hanging straight and swung slightly along with the body movements. The animal seemed like an elegant king, surrounded by a group of mutated rats and retreating unhurriedly.

The eyes of Luo Yuan glowed; the body of this mutated rat wasn't over-sized. Comparing it to the giant snake and the giant dog, it was small. Other than it having thousands of mutated rats surrounding it, which made it somewhat troublesome, it wasn't comparable to the blue level animals he'd met previously.

“Have you the nerve to try?” Luo Yuan asked the recently formed team.

“If we don't, we would have stayed at home. Why should we fight desperately here? It's either die from hunger for being a coward or die from overeating for being daring. Let's die from overeating this time,” Huang Yaoguang responded. He could see that Luo Yuan, Chen Haiyan and the others seemed to have a strong urge to attack. Though he didn't know exactly why, it had to be due to the

value of the king of rats. He remembered a hearsay, and his heart suddenly throbbed faster.

“Yes, right. You may quit now if you don’t want to go.” After Chen Haiyan finished his sentence, he looked at everyone.

“We’re already here, so wouldn’t it be a joke if we quit now? Just count me in,” said Qian Dakui in a pant, curling his lip and putting one end of his shield heavily on the floor. Though his stamina was good, it still wasn't easy to carry along such a heavy weapon.

“Boss Zhou, what about you three?” Chen Haiyan asked the other three.

“We will not quit but I’m more worried of the others trying to take advantage of us. After all, we’re not the only ones here!” Boss Zhou said with a smirk, stroking his handgun and looking toward the other people nearby.

Luo Yuan didn't particularly care. His goal was to kill the king of rats to complete the mission. And how many people were to divide the capture, it would only matter later. Of course, he would be glad to receive more, but it didn't matter if he received less. After all, he had already decided to go to the other places to hunt for blue level organisms. So he should not argue with others for peanuts. Besides, if there were more people, they could share the risk and increase the probability of completing the mission. However, he couldn’t say all of that aloud. He thought for a while and said, “Perhaps we can talk to them and set some rules. I don’t think many will dare to go.”

“I’ll do it. I know the leaders of the larger groups!” said Chen Haiyan after hesitating for a moment.

“Sure, you do it then,” Luo Yuan said indifferently. He could see that Chen Haiyan was a very ambitious person. He was very proactive and had been in the leading position along the way. However, it was none of Luo Yuan’s business. In fact, it was beneficial to him if the man was more proactive.

When the hundreds of them were facing thousands of mutated rats and the king, many hesitated as expected. Those who persisted were only about fifty people and they were divided into three rough teams. After they delayed, the group of rats had gradually crossed over one of the rubbish mountains. Seeing them about to disappear soon, Luo Yuan was very worried but he couldn't do anything.

After a while, Chen Haiyan finally came back. He looked toward the front and said quickly, “Because of the limited time, we’ll talk on the way.” He started running, and explaining quickly, “The results of the discussion were this: three teams will attack from three different corners. The team who kills it first will receive half of the capture, the other two teams will evenly divide the other half. The benefit of this arrangement is that we will still receive some even if we don’t manage to kill it!”

“That’s good. Otherwise we may be cheated even if we kill the king of rats. After all, those who can survive here aren’t easy to deal with. They’ll do anything for a profit,” Qian Dakui said with a nod.

The landfill was a mess and a cruel place, it seemed like a different world from the orderly city area. Human lives had no value here. There were hundreds of people who died or disappeared every day. Some were killed by mutated rats while others by other people. The corpses would become bones even before dawn. When people were eating mutated rats, the mutated rats were eating people too.

If the terrestrial species did not have strict discipline, their speed would be reduced when they moved in large numbers. After about ten minutes, the team managed to catch up to the group of rats.

The fight started quickly. After a few skirmishes broke out among the group of rats, they suddenly stopped moving. Maybe they noticed that the number of their enemies had reduced and, thus, it was a good opportunity to attack. So they started to come over like a sea wave.

At that moment, Luo Yuan felt tension increase suddenly. He stepped forward and back, swayed to both right and left, and waved the Zhanmadao with his hand like a mirage under the moonlight. Those mutated rats which did not fear death were cut by the intangible knife as soon as they jumped at him. He was defending himself from the mutated rats' attacks. With his sharp blade, he tore open the group of rats. Each difficult step he took left corpses of mutated rats and the ground spattered with fresh blood.

“Beep, one point for knife skill.”

Luo Yuan didn't notice the message. He was focusing solely on the fight, and his body was radiating a breath which made people's hearts throb. This breath also caused every rushing mutated rat to shudder slightly, interrupting their movement.

It was only less than a minute but the team members were already reduced. As boss Zhou and the other two were using guns, they were left behind. If it was just a small group of mutated rats, they would be safe. Unfortunately, it was a large group of rats and they came from every direction.

One rat bit at a leg of one of them from the back, and as soon as the man killed it, there were another two rats rushing toward him. He kept shooting to kill the two rats in a flurry and then found out that he had been separated from the team. More rats poured in, and he could only yell out once before being devoured by the group of rats.

"Damn it!" Boss Zhou wanted to save him but it was too late. He cursed and his face became gloomy. He then winked to his last follower, and they squeezed into the middle of the team.

Huang Yaoguang and his companions followed tightly behind Luo Yuan, sharing Luo Yuan's pressure by blocking the mutated rats from both sides but soon it became too difficult to continue as they started to get wounded in the fight. When Chen Haiyan and Qian Dakui saw the situation, they joined in quickly and formed a ten people circle to block the attacks from the mutated rats.

Then, there were gunshots from afar. The group of rats were shocked and they rushed in another direction. "F*ck! Is it the

army?” Chen Haiyan turned back to take a look and suddenly felt furious. He grinded his teeth and said, “If I knew who gave the notice, I would kill him.”

There were about ten soldiers shooting toward the group of rats with rifles. The surrounded mutated rats rushed toward them, reducing the number of enemies at Luo Yuan’s side.

He looked for a time with a changing facial expression, then finally sighed in disappointment. “Let’s go, with the existence of these people, we won’t be able to even drink some soup. They will never let any leader leveled mutated animals off.”

“We’ll just leave like this?” Huang Yaoguang asked in disbelief, touching his wounded arm.

“What else can we do? Fight with the army for food?” Qian Dakui vented his anger by knocking down a mutated rat with his shield and then spitting in fury. Having worked so hard and then seeing the almost caught prey being taken away, anyone would be full of distress.

Chapter 23: Succeeded

“Bang! Bang!”

Two gun shots rang out.

“Aaaaa!”

Far in the distance, two burn marks suddenly appeared on the Rat King’s body. The creature howled loudly and swung its long tail violently until there was sonic boom!

“Bang!”

Another burn on its body. The Rat King squeaked and realized the disaster it was facing. Then, it no longer took care of the other normal mutated rats but tried to escape instead. The surrounding mutated rats quickly faded away too.

“Bang! Bang! Bang!”

The heavy sound of sniper rifle rang out continuously but apparently it was difficult to target the nimble Rat King. All three shots missed the target. Soon, the Rat King ran further away while spattering its blood along the path.

“Good chance!” Luo Yuan thought, and immediately chased after it. The others were stunned but quickly, they followed. Yet, they

were left behind in just a few seconds. Luo Yuan was very fast and could be compared to a champion of short-distance running. Yet, his speed was still slower than that of the Rat King.

Fortunately, the speed of the Rat King was reduced gradually. The heavy caliber sniper rifle had caused three bowl sized wounds on its body, and the wounds were still bleeding continuously. Thus, it might not live long. After a few minutes, the speed of the Rat King had slowed greatly. Losing large amounts of blood had also drained its energy rapidly, and its silver-white fur had darkened and lost its original glaze. It let out a howl and its body started to falter.

“Please don’t die now, at least not now!” Luo Yuan ran desperately while muttering to himself. If he did not kill the Rat King himself, he would fail the mission. And the punishment, which will deduct double experience points, might even drop him down a level. It was something he could not bear. He panted heavily as his lungs seemed to be overworking.

Finally, the distance between the two of them started getting smaller. Luo Yuan became excited. The Rat King seemed to have felt the coming danger, or perhaps it knew that he could no longer escape with its current condition, so after running for a moment longer he stopped abruptly.

It turned back to face Luo Yuan. Its crimson red eyes were bloodthirsty. The creature howled in a low voice and its muscles pulled up its lips, exposing the sharp teeth which were different from a normal mutated rat’s. The slender tail was swinging slightly at the back of the body while its blood-stained fur was

standing up, revealing that the Rat King was ready to attack.

When Luo Yuan saw it, he reduced his speed and his face became grave. As the saying went, 'Though the tiger has died, its authority toward the others is still around'. Though the Rat King was badly injured, it would never allow others to despise it.

And the atmosphere was filled with the depressing breath which stopped the chirping sounds in the surroundings. Luo Yuan held his knife tightly, focusing on the sanguine eyes of the Rat King. If it was a normal fight, he would drag out the time as long as possible. But time was what he lacked now, he had to act fast.

After staring at each others' eyes for a while, Luo Yuan moved suddenly. He stepped heavily on the ground, bending his body to almost the same level as the land surface, so that when he dragged his knife through the floor, every step he took formed a shallow hole on the ground. He was like a ferocious tiger, speedily moving forward.

It was almost at the same time that there came a sonic boom. Though it did not come near Luo Yuan yet, his hair blew madly in the wind and his face was cut, which caused many narrow line wounds. While facing the fierce wind, Luo Yuan narrowed his eyes. Though his high agility was dragged down by other body qualities and he wasn't able to unleash it completely, his eyesight was not affected. He could see a tail vaguely sweeping towards him. He knew that if he got hit by it, his body would definitely be cut in two.

His pupil contracted and he held up his Zhanmadao, hacking

violently in the air. The moment he cut off the tail, a terribly strong energy was transmitted through the Zhanmadao. Before he was able to react, his body was thrown into the air.

“Aaaoo!”

The Rat King loudly cried out in pain and used its remaining strength to attack Luo Yuan who was still mid-air. Luo Yuan forcibly controlled his body and fell heavily to the floor. He looked at the Rat King, which was coming over, but did not try to avoid the oncoming attack. Instead, he scurried forward and the distance between them was shortened quickly.

“Bang! Bang!”

Luo Yuan’s heart gave a throb and he felt a pricking sensation at his back. He wasn’t able to react and felt a throbbing pain in his back. He hissed softly, moved his body slightly, and another intense pain followed. Then, he realized what had happened. He was both shocked and angry, and could no longer maintain his fighting mood. As he saw the Rat King rush toward him, he flipped and evaded to the side.

“What are you doing?” a shocked and angry voice came from afar. It was Huang Yaoguang’s voice.

“I wanted to save him but I missed. How can I fire if I am timid and hesitant?” Boss Zhou said indifferently and continued to fire. But he was shooting the Rat King already as he thought that Luo Yuan would definitely die after getting hit twice.

Luo Yuan was furious when he heard the conversation. Everyone would certainly know what boss Zhou was thinking even if he was retarded. He shot his partner in order to get two portions of the Rat King. If Luo Yuan wasn't wearing the bulletproof vest, he would have already died.

Such man as Zhou was not fit to live.

Fortunately, the Rat King was distracted or Luo Yuan would have been in real danger. He tried to feel his body again and it seemed to be alright. Then he jumped up, caught up with the Rat King in a few steps and cut off its thin short leg with a swing of his knife. The running Rat King lost its balance and slumped to the floor.

But it wasn't over yet. Luo Yuan walked quickly toward it, dragging his long knife through the soft part of the stomach to cut it open. The inner organs spilled onto the floor. The Rat King painfully raised up its head, showed its ferocious teeth and tried to bite him.

However, a bright cold light flashed through its throat and the blood oozed out like spring water. Luo Yuan feared that it was not dead yet, so he obliquely cut through its throat until the tip of the knife touched its skull. Only then he pulled out his knife. The head of the Rat King slumped to the floor. The creature was no longer breathing.

After a few seconds, the notification of the system finally appeared:

“Optional Mission, E-level Mission: Hunt down and kill the Rat King is completed. Mission completion time: 2 hours 5 min.

Evaluation of the mission: Average”

“Reward: Basic experience value 800”

“Average evaluation: Experience value +0”

“Whuu, we’re finally done.”

Luo Yuan was relieved. Though he only got an average evaluation and received no extra reward, he was still satisfied with managing to finish the mission. He turned to look at the people who were coming over. Their footsteps stopped eventually. The face of boss Zhou was uncertain while his right hand was tightly holding the handgun.

His face was stern. In a low voice he asked, “Can somebody explain to me what just happened?”

Huang Yaoguang wanted to say something but he was stopped by Luo Yuan. “Chen Haiyan, this boss Zhou was called by you right. I respect you, so what do you think? For firing at partner, how should he be punished?”

Everyone's eyes quickly moved to boss Zhou and Chen Haiyan.

Chen Haiyan looked sour and said, "Luo Yuan, it was just an accident, and it may happen during a fight. Fortunately you're alright, so why don't we let boss Zhou apologize and then compensate? What do you say?" He hadn't seen clearly what had happened and thought it was just an accident. Furthermore, he had called boss Zhou to join in this movement and their relationship was quite good, so he had to keep boss Zhou safe.

Luo Yuan pointed at Chen Haiyan with his forefinger and laughed. Then he glowered. "Accident? What accident! I have never heard that two continuous shots were because of an accident. If it wasn't for wearing a bulletproof vest, how would I have survived that?" Luo Yuan walked towards them while talking.

There was an uproar. The faces of Qian Dakui and the others turned darker as they felt disappointment. After all, nobody wished to have such a person in their team. It was always a taboo to attack in a sly way.

They stepped back to make room for boss Zhou and his subordinate, and even estranged from Chen Haiyan.

The face of Chen Haiyan was grim, cursing boss Zhou for being so obsessed that he even wanted to kill a teammate. It would have been alright if the teammate had really died, nobody would fight for a dead person and there would be less people to divide the trophy between. However, he was still alive and Chen Haiyan himself was implicated in the conspiracy.

Luo Yuan walked toward boss Zhou with a grim face, releasing the breath which caused others' hearts to throb.

“What do you want?” Boss Zhou asked stubbornly but his tone showed he was kind of admitting his mistake. He stepped slightly backward and his right hand which was holding gun was sweating as he saw Luo Yuan slowly come over.

“I am a person who clearly distinguished between kindness and hatred. Since you fired at me twice, then I will return with two strikes with my knife. Isn't that fair?” Luo Yuan said. The others moved to the sides. The subordinate of boss Zhou was sweating abnormally. He looked both right and left and moved away hesitantly. Chen Haiyan seemed to want to say something, opening his mouth but remaining quiet in the end.

“Son of the b*tch!” Boss Zhou scolded his subordinate. He swallowed and moved slowly backward and said to Luo Yuan, “Are you not afraid of losing your life?”

“I am more afraid of someone attacking me from behind again!” Luo Yuan gazed at him.

“Then f*ck you!” Boss Zhou knew he could not avoid it anymore. So he suddenly raised his right hand and pulled the trigger to shoot at Luo Yuan. As soon as he shot, he felt cold in his hand and then an intense pain.

He held his broken hand and let out an agonized cry. He kept

moving backward, sweat streaming down his face. He was finally frightened. “Oh please, I beg you, Boss Luo! My bad! I won’t do it again. I still have wife and kids, please don’t kill me!”

“If your wife isn’t good looking, you don’t have to worry. If your wife is beautiful, then you have even less to worry about. That was just one strike, you still owe me one more!” Luo Yuan said coldly.

He moved forward, quickly put his Zhanmadao into Boss Zhou’s stomach and twisted it forcefully until the intestines were cut off. Then, he quickly pulled out the knife and fresh blood flowed out slowly. Boss Zhou pressed on his stomach and fell to the floor with an agonized expression. His body twitched, blood oozing out from his mouth as he stared up and said with difficulty, “You...you are so cruel!”

The others looked at Boss Zhou, who was gasping for his last breath, and then the Rat King with its stomach cut open and the knife cut which went through its throat to the skull. The people felt like they agreed with boss Zhou. However, in that world, if you weren’t cruel to others, they were cruel to you.

“Since it’s done, shall we start to divide the spoils?” Chen Haiyan said. He didn’t seem to be too affected by what had just happened. “We don’t have much time already, those soldiers may soon find us.” Because of the limited time, they started to divide the Rat King.

Luo Yuan stabbed into its neck with his knife’s tip, pulled horizontally with great force and cut off the head. He then chopped off a hind leg and stopped. Though he could get more, it

will give a greedy impression to others. Furthermore, he had already gotten the best part.

His knife was so sharp that it was not excessive to say that it could easily peel metal. Though the skin and flesh of the Rat King was tough, it didn't hinder the light blue level Zhanmadao much. When Luo Yuan took out a sack to put his trophy in, the others were still cutting the meat with difficulty.

Luo Yuan took a look at the time, greeted Huang Yaoguang and some others, then chose a road and quickly left. He didn't dare to stay there for long since the army was looking around. As long as they followed the blood stains, they would be there in no time. If he stayed longer, it would be more dangerous.

There were still some mutated rats at the landfill. With the sudden escape of their king, they were lost and roamed freely. Luo Yuan killed some of them along his way and put them into his sack so that he could exchange them for gas with fatty Xie and also to cover what was inside.

When Luo Yuan blended into the crowd, he felt relieved. As he followed the crowd to the shack area, he saw some army jeeps at the junction. There were some fully equipped policemen too. As they still looked relax, apparently, they hadn't received any messages yet. Luo Yuan just took a look and averted his eyes. Soon, he found fatty Xie. His grain had already sold out. As it had been a large group of mutated rats, it would not be enough to trade even if he had had more grain.

He stood on a giant stone and was looking around. He wanted to

leave as he had already gotten more than enough mutated rat meat because the value of it had quickly plummeted. Furthermore, the meat could not last long like grain. And processed meat wasn't as profitable as fresh meat. But after thinking for a bit, he resolved to stay. Since he had decided to get to know Luo Yuan, he should not give up. Though the gas was precious, it meant nothing to him as he had connections.

“Brother Luo, you are finally here. I have been waiting for some time.” Fatty Xie jumped off the stone when he saw Luo Yuan and his belly fat flopped.

“I have been delayed by an incident,” Luo Yuan said briefly and switched the topic. “Have you brought the gas?”

“Already brought it here, just waiting for you,” Fatty Xie said brightly. “I have a total of 30 liters, how much do you want?”

“Let's deal at some place with lesser people!” Luo Yuan looked at the nearby policemen and said to fatty Xie.

“Okay, let's go to the junction then,” Fatty Xie agreed, also glancing at where Luo Yuan was looking at. He waved his hand and his two subordinates carried the two plastic tanks, each filled with gas.

They left the landfill and chose a remote corner. Luo Yuan threw all the mutated rats on the floor; there were seven of them. Fatty Xie did not mind the bloody smell at all. He squatted and checked the rats carefully. Apparently every mutated rat had just died as

they were still warm. Their wounds were located on the head. The cuts were smooth and went directly into the brain. Every wound was also of the same size, like they had been done measuring with a ruler.

Fatty Xie was amazed and he put a higher value on Luo Yuan. He smiled brightly and said, “On a quick estimation, these mutated rats are about six catties each, five catties once the blood is drained. So, you can get 2.5 liter of gas. Anyway, you can have this tank of 30 liters and pay me the rest later.”

Luo Yuan knew Fatty Xie was trying to be good. According to today’s rate, every catty of mutated rats would not even enough for three catties of grain, so Fatty Xie was suffering losses. But that was the way to network. You had to pay the price before you could earn. Give and take, that’s how a relationship would be formed. When Luo Yuan thought of it, it wasn’t too bad — he may need his help in the future, so he said understandingly, “Let’s work cordially together next time.”

When the deal was done, their relationship suddenly became closer. Fatty Xie said mysteriously, “I heard there was a Rat King today. Did you see it?”

Luo Yuan was shocked but soon he realized that it was alright. He unwillingly said, “Don’t mention it. I feel angry just thinking about what happened. I was about to get it but it was then grabbed by the policemen. I had no choice but to retreat. Or else I wouldn’t have killed even these few rats.”

Fatty Xie didn’t doubt him. He sighed and said softly, “As soon as

there's a leader-leveled organism in Donghu City, the army and the policemen will take it. Now, the price of each catty of that meat is very expensive. If brother Luo can get it, please, do contact me. Price will definitely not be a problem."

"If I can get some, I will definitely not forget you, Boss Xie. But to meet one of these animals is not only very difficult, but they are also very dangerous too. Thus, even if I can meet one, I may not be able to kill it." Luo Yuan was suddenly had a thought and said, "If you can get a heavy caliber sniper rifle, we may have hope." He had a deep impression of the sniper rifles the policemen used. It were just a few shots but the light-blue level animal was already badly wounded. And that was only because they did not hit its vital spots. If the shots had directly hit the Rat King's head or heart, it would have definitely died instantly.

If he could get one of those, his next mission would be easy.

Fatty Xie was shocked. "Brother Luo, you're too brave. For handguns, government can just omit it because the world has changed. As for sniper rifles, they're definitely illegal. Even the whole Donghu City doesn't have that many of them."

"I thought so too," Luo Yuan said. He didn't have high hopes, after all. Unless one had connections with the army or high status people, it was impossible to get one of those. Luo Yuan didn't want to talk anymore so as not to get in trouble and soon left.

Chapter 24: Evolved Man

As soon as Luo Yuan got back to the rented room, he took out the head and the thigh of the Rat King out from the sack. He was slightly excited and used his identification technique on the meat.

“The head of the Rat King”

“Function: Food, Material.”

“Rarity: Light Blue.”

“Weight: 10 kg”

“Effect: 1. Slightly strengthens body stamina

2. Slightly increases strength

3. Slightly enhances sensory perception

4. May evolve the body, though the possibility is small.”

“Comment: Its strong teeth and bone can be used to make weapons. Its flesh is rich in active components which can enhance your body’s inner qualities and may even evolve it.”

“The thigh of the Rat King”

“Function: Food, Material.”

“Rarity: Light Blue.”

“Weight: 7 kg”

“Effect: 1. Slightly strengthens body stamina

2. Slightly increases strength

3. May evolve the body, though the possibility is small.”

“Comment: Its bone can be used to make weapons. Its flesh is rich in active components which can enhance your body’s inner qualities and may even evolve it.”

After digesting the messages in his mind, Luo Yuan was excited. “That’s why those people fought so desperately for the Rat King, even the army joining in the fight, too. If everyone knew blue leveled organisms had such effects, many would want to have some. I hadn’t known that blue leveled organisms could not only strengthen the body’s inner qualities but also cause it to evolve.

“Does that also mean that somebody has already evolved? Recently, many blue leveled organisms in Donghu City have been killed, so there might have been someone lucky enough. How’s it like when they evolve? Do they increase in size like other organisms or does it affect the other properties?” If evolving meant increasing in body size, he would rather not to.

He thought of something and took his hand phone from his bedroom, but its battery was completely discharged. He changed its battery. As this area was always experiencing blackouts, he had prepared four to five extra batteries. Once the sweet music of switched on the phone rang, he accessed the web and searched for evolved men. There were some information about them.

Luo Yuan opened every site but most of the information was unreliable. Some places were just talking nonsense without any direct proof. The moment Luo Yuan clicked onto the last post, his face became serious.

“An evolved man was found in Sha City. He killed a mutated dog with his fist which froze it to death. Proof is in the photo!” The picture was very clear with a man, turned away from the camera, in a punching posture. There was a huge frosted mutated dog in front of his fist. Below the post were hundreds of replies.

“Instinct needs fire, [I need sofa.](#)”

The sentence should be meaningless or just some modern internet language because the commenter may have just wanted to be the first person who replied to the post or to earn more points as a member of the forum.

“I’m also in Sha City, why didn’t I know of his existence?”

“It should be fake, this mutated dog must have been brought out from a refrigerator.”

“The doggie is so pitiful, wuwuwu..!”

Most were useless comments. So he scanned through, looking for more valuable information.

“You feel weird because you haven’t seen it before. Maybe you guys don’t know, but I have a friend who’s an evolved person, though his ability was about strength. And he has been called to serve by the government.”

“I’m an evolved man too but I don’t dare to show off so that I won’t be found out.”

“Certainly there are evolved men but they aren’t very superb. I worked in a police station and I used to see one. He was like a normal man, could be killed with a gun, just that he had some special powers.”

When Luo Yuan found out that the evolved men did not change in body size, he was relieved, but at the same time, he felt a sense of urgency too. The most important thing during troubled times was not only power and wealth, but also personal strength.

As he had no wealth or power, he could only rely on his own

strength. How could he be more nourished than others when everyone was struggling to survive and were afraid of tomorrow. It was because of the fact that he was stronger than the other normal people that he could live like he used to. No matter how much the world changed, it was always the strong preying upon the weak. It was just getting more obvious today!

As Luo Yuan thought that, he acted immediately.

He took out his Zhanmadao and peeled off the scalp of the Rat King. After washing it, the skull was as smooth as jade. He tried piercing it with his knife and realized that this skull was very hard. As he feared that his Zhanmadao may break, he didn't dare to use a lot of strength.

He took out a small axe from his toolbox and hacked at the skull for a few times. Finally, it broke open and the greyish white brain juice poured into a big bowl.

Then he used his identification technique and found out that it could only enhance sensory perception. But it was not unusual since sensory perception was related to the brain and not to the other parts of the body.

After that, he cut the rest of the meat into pieces, washed it and filled one big basin. Luo Yuan set up a pan, turned on the gas and started boiling water. He was clever enough not to put all the meat in to prevent the heat from damaging its effects.

He only cut a small piece of meat to put it in the boiling water.

When it was cooked, he used his identification technique to identify again, and the result showed the difference as expected. It could still strengthen the body's inner qualities but the last effect 'may evolve the body, though the possibility is small' was gone. It seemed that cooking food destroyed something.

“Shall I eat it raw?” Luo Yuan hesitated. As a person who was used to eating cooked food, he could not just accept the bloody smell of raw meat. But his hesitation collapsed like weak building blocks in less than a second under the temptation to evolve. Sacrificing some comfort for a chance to evolve; nobody would ever make a wrong choice here!

Though the raw meat was cleansed and cut into slices, he still felt disgusted when he put it in his mouth. It was his automatic response which could not be suppressed. He took some times to adapt. Gradually, his body became hot. And that condition was similar to what he felt when he upgraded, just weaker. Luo Yuan was thrilled and continued eating the raw meat.

When he finished two full plates, his stomach was very full, but Luo Yuan didn't feel anything special. “Maybe it's not so fast!” he comforted himself. He waited longer until the warmth gradually disappeared, but he still felt nothing more than the excitement of consuming lots of supplement.

Luo Yuan turned on the properties column and checked carefully. But it didn't change at all. He neither evolved nor his properties had upgraded. “Is it I'm that I'm too unlucky or did I not have enough meat?” When facing such a situation, Luo Yuan was disappointed but he could only accept the reality. So he

marinated the leftover meat to make them last longer.

When he finished his work, he found that it was 12 o'clock already. But he did not feel sleepy at all. So he practiced his knife skills throughout the night. The next morning, he used the leftover brain juice to cook a bowl of soup and drank it as his breakfast. Then, he fried some of the marinated rat meat, which no longer went bad easily but could still be used as food.

He could endure the raw meat but not the marinated raw meat. When he thought of the feeling of smooth and salty taste, he felt uncomfortable. Since he was not able to evolve, instead of continuing hopelessly, it was better to just fill his stomach.

When the rat meat was fried, the whole kitchen filled with the aroma which increased people's appetite. Though Luo Yuan had already eaten, he couldn't help but swallow a mouthful of saliva and greedily eat another few pieces. Though he had just added some salt and his cooking skills weren't good, the fried meat was so delicious that he enjoyed it very much.

Soon, he was ready to leave. The car had already been prepared. It was a relatively new Pajero Jeep which cost about three hundred thousand in the old days. Today, however, together with the leftover 8 liters of gas, it cost only two hundred catties of food. It could have been even lower if he had negotiated. With the newly established control over fuel, the cars had become scrap metal. Other than for consuming space in the garage, they weren't useful for much else.

Luo Yuan didn't feel like departing so early because of the

incident that occurred yesterday. Though he did not reveal anything, it could still be found out easily if somebody was to investigate.

He never looked down on the government's and army's abilities, nor put his hope in someone else. The army had always been a violent organization. If one fought with them for food and got caught, he would either get beaten or worse, lose his life. This was especially so after the collapsed societal order—nobody could ensure their own safety after provoking them.

After Luo Yuan let the fried rat meat cool down at the living room, he put it in a big plastic bag and tied it tight with a rope. Then, his acute hearing heard footsteps at the door and he slightly paused.

“Who's there?” Luo Yuan tried to ask.

“Uncle...” there came an answer in a timid voice. Luo Yuan was relieved and opened the door.

A thirteen or fourteen-years-old girl was hesitantly standing at the door. Her fingers were worryingly agitating her shirt, and she was blushing.

She was actually neighbor living on the same fourth floor. But the people in the city were said to be cold. Luo Yuan felt like he used to see the young lady before but he did not know her name. At first, he was confused about her arrival, but soon he knew what was happening. It was the fault of the rat meat which smelled too

good. As Luo Yuan saw that her face looked obviously thinner than before, he felt sympathetic. So he said gently, “You are from the opposite side, right? What’s your name?”

“Uncle, I am Wang Shishi!”

“You haven’t had your breakfast, have you? Come in!” Luo Yuan said.

The young lady was shy, she blushed from just saying her name. She hesitated for a while but still entered. She curiously looked around and then lowered her head, feeling nervous. Luo Yuan opened up a plastic bag and filled a plate with meat. Then, he took out a box of milk from the no longer working fridge and put it on the table, asking, “Where’re your parents?”

She took a pair of chopsticks to take a piece of meat and put it in her mouth, she then chewed slightly and swallowed. “Dad’s gone to work to the construction site, while my mom went out too. They will come back only at night.”

“Construction site!” He just remembered that the entrance to the residential area had a notice for recruitment. The government of the city seemed to want to build something big.

Looking at the young lady wolfing down her food, Luo Yuan felt funny and said, “Eat slower and drink some milk. Why doesn’t your mom take you along?”

“My mom said it’s too dangerous and asked me to stay at home.” When Wang Shishi felt that Luo Yuan was quite friendly, she started to take it easy. She said recklessly, “Uncle, why do I feel that my body is so hot!” She then timidly looked at Luo Yuan.

Luo Yuan was shocked, and thought that he had heard wrongly as the hint was not what a thirteen or fourteen years old young girl should say. But soon, he found out what was wrong. She was red all over her face, her neck and also her arms.

Then, the blood was oozing out from her nostrils and dripped on the table in front of her. When Wang Shishi saw the blood, she was shocked and wiped her nose. As she saw her hands full of blood, she was so nervous that she pushed the bowl and chopsticks away and cried loudly, “Uncle, please don’t kill me...wuwuwu... I will not eat greedily again. I...I’m still a virgin, willing to do anything!” The girls today knew everything they should know and also what they shouldn’t know as they have been using internet since a young age.

Well, nobody could blame the young lady for her misunderstanding. She had just wanted to eat something and ate it until her body was hot and then her nose started to bleed. Anyone would find it unusual.

Luo Yuan felt sorry and blamed himself for not being more attentive. It was important pay heed to the type of one’s body before eating ginseng. And this flesh of blue leveled organism was apparently stronger than the ginseng as it contained large amounts of absorbable active components. Luo Yuan’s body’s inner qualities were very strong, and he still felt hot after eating. But this young

lady's inner qualities were not even as strong as those of a normal adult, so the result shouldn't have been unexpected. If the energy wasn't gentle, the end result wouldn't have been as simple as a nose bleed already.

"Alright, please don't cry!" Luo Yuan scolded.

Wang Shishi was so scared that she stopped herself from crying and sobbed.

"Raise your head and lie on the chair. How do you feel now?"

"I am still feeling hot." Wang Shishi timidly answered.

"Don't stand up, okay?" Luo Yuan said with a straight face.

"I will be very obedient and will not move." Wang Shishi was very scared, and so she sat there trembling, uncertain where to put her hands.

Luo Yuan took out a towel from the washroom and moistened it with water. When he got back to the living room, she was still there, lying on the chair, not moving. He walked toward her and put the towel on her head. "You will be alright. You are still young and I don't know what you were thinking. Anyway, I'm going out soon, so you can go back first."

"Yes, uncle!" Wang Shishi felt that she must have misunderstood and was very embarrassed while holding the wet towel. "Then I'll

go first, uncle.” Her watery eyes kept looking at the unfinished rat meat.

“Take it, take it! But please don’t eat it again to prevent your nose from bleeding again.” Luo Yuan said impatiently.

“Thank you uncle.” Wang Shishi grinned.

Chapter 25: The Large Group Of Insects

Luo Yuan drove out of Jingyue District. The road was flat and the cars were rarely seen.

Luo Yuan just started to drive when dizziness struck him. He wasn't aware of it at the beginning as he thought it was the result of the insomnia he had.

But soon he felt something was wrong.

The surroundings suddenly became very noisy and then silent. His sight started to distort and turn vague.

Luo Yuan braked and stopped the car at the roadside.

He rubbed his face, trying to wake himself but it got worse instead. His mind buzzed like there were lots of mosquitoes inside. He was certain his head was going to split open at any moment. "What's happening, nothing like this had happened before!"

He kept taking deep breaths, resting on the seat and trying to maintain his equanimity.

Fortunately, as the time passed, all the illusions faded.

Gradually, an amazing feeling came. He closed his eyes and enjoyed it. He wondered whether it was an illusion that he could

sense his surroundings. Though he had closed his eyes, he could still sense the rough location of certain objects.

Suddenly, he reached out his hands and grabbed something from a corner in the car. When he opened his eyes, he was shocked to see that it was a palm sized mickey doll which had been thrown to the corner.

Luo Yuan was sure he hadn't noticed such doll in the car prior to closing his eyes. The place was dark, as it was usual now, after all. But somehow he'd known there was something in the corner and could roughly estimate its size too.

No reason, no explanation—it was completely illogical.

He kept experiencing the feeling and took out things from time to time: something from a toolbox, magazine, one-time use cup, and even a box of condom. He hadn't checked what was in the car when buying it, and the toolbox was also closed but it hadn't affected his senses. It was as if the toolbox was transparent.

When he realized that it wasn't a coincidence but real, he felt surprise and excited simultaneously. He knew clearly the strength of such an ability. If somebody would attack him from behind, he could sense it without turning his back. If he'd had such a power yesterday, he would have dared to attack the group of rats by himself. Though such a power didn't directly enhance his killing strength but it was more like a lubricant to a machine, and it will definitely help a lot in both fighting and surviving.

After about 10 minutes, his brain finally awoke completely. And he was even more energetic.

Then the notification sound from the system came into his mind.

“Beep, Sensory Perception +1”

“So, this is the sensory perception! I thought I had evolved... Then it must be because of drinking the brain juice. I didn't know the reaction would be so much more intense when compared to the system gently adding a point. Enhancing inner qualities using the flesh of mutated organisms seems to be rougher and more dangerous. I should be more careful when I drink next time.”

“But the body stamina and strength didn't change at all. This type of light blue color organism could only help before the property reached 11 points, and when it was above that, the effect would no longer be obvious.” Luo Yuan analyzed within himself.

“But I could get a property point; it's already a surprise to me.” He was slightly disappointed but his mind-set adjusted quickly. He started to familiarize himself with this relatively mysterious property.

He roughly estimated the range he could sense and the result was about three meters. Anything that entered that range would not be able to escape from his senses. But when that something was outside the range, Luo Yuan was no different from a normal person.

Actually, everyone had sensory perception. For example, when somebody stares at you, you will look at him suddenly. Another example is, if somebody is standing secretly behind you and though he does not make any sound, you will still feel uncomfortable like something is behind you. It is just the sensory perception of a normal person is very weak and is always being neglected.

Luo Yuan rested for a while before he got back on the road. When he reached the highway located at the outskirts of the city, the number of cars increased slightly. However, those were not private cars but the army's heavy trucks with tires close to the height of an adult. They were all carrying various goods and materials. And these large metallic trucks passed by Luo Yuan quite frequently, making his jeep vibrate slightly each time.

Luo Yuan switch on his radio. The receivable stations were very few and all of them were reporting news. The entertainment radio stations had already closed down.

“.....****the central called for an emergency army meeting regarding the sea monster case at the eastern sea region. All large military regions near the coastal areas of south east are ready for first level war.”

“The temporary panel of the government during war raised the danger level again and also pointed out that the living organism crisis is a great challenge to the survival of human beings. Once again, the panel appealed to the people to keep calm and be united. The Central Republic Government will restore the order of the society as fast as possible and will also recover the society's

manufacture...”

“Brazil’s economic capital, Sao Paulo, fell completely and there were more than a hundred thousand people who died. Brazil’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs has requested a military support from the more powerful countries. It is reported that the large group of animals are mostly from the quickly expanding Amazon region, some of whose organisms are demonstrating some obvious mutations.”

“The flight which the vice president of European Union, Mr. Eros, took was attacked by birds and the plane crashed in Switzerland. A total of 18 personnel on board died.”

Luo Yuan listened to the radio calmly. He even took out a bottle of mineral water to drink while listening. As the situation had become very bad, Luo Yuan wouldn’t be surprised if he heard something unbelievable.

He touched the steering wheel, thinking of where he should go.

He had left in a hurry, without preparing much, and had no idea about his destination.

He didn't notice when the sky started to gradually darken. It seemed to have been covered by the clouds but the mineral water on the glass stand was shaking and forming ripples from time to time. Sometimes Luo Yuan even heard buzzing sounds.

While he was still driving, he suddenly felt a throb in his heart and was struck by sense of indescribable impatience, panic, and chill.

Then, the ear-splitting siren of an air defense warning tore through the serene atmosphere. As Luo Yuan had never heard such a sound before, it was difficult for him to find a suitable adjective to describe it. It seemed to be able to penetrate through every place, including both the hearts of the strong and the weak-willed.

He unconsciously raised his head to take a look and the sight sent a chill down his body. It was akin to falling into an ice cellar.

A huge green colored face appeared in the sky.

As the distance was too great, Luo Yuan couldn't estimate the actual size of the face and was uncertain when it had appeared.

The face looked vague and unreal, but it was the face of a man. Though, what made people chilled was the fact that the face was continuously changing its expression. It could be angry at one time, but laugh, smile or frown at another.

And the buzzing from afar was getting louder. It started indistinctly but was becoming so loud that it even covered the sound of the siren.

The loud sound wave had caused Luo Yuan's blood to vibrate uncontrollably which left him dizzy and nauseated.

As the face in the sky got bigger, the look became more vague. Luo Yuan quickly realized that it wasn't a single organism but was formed by millions of green dots.

Luo Yuan knew that the nature had lots of organisms which demonstrated some similar traits in order to threaten their enemies. For example, lots of small fish gathered together to pretend to be a big fish while some peculiar moths would also gather together and form a weird design.

As human being were positioned at the top of the food chain in the nature, they had an overwhelming advantage in the competition, thus they would naturally be imitated by other organisms.

Then, a heavy truck suddenly plowed into a guardrail, rolled over on one side and gave a loud noise. As the heavy truck generated terrific forces, they added with the violent friction against the concrete surface and produced a long spark of one meter high.

The sight woke Luo Yuan.

It didn't matter what was coming. If he wanted to live, he had to leave this place.

He quickly turned the steering wheel, pressed hard on the accelerator and drove back. The car jetted out a dense black smoke and sped down the road.

He looked back and the face seemed to have grown bigger. Its speed was very fast, though Luo Yuan was racing as fast he could, he wasn't able to get rid of it.

Worried, he took a glance to both sides and drove his car toward the **** nearby.

The security there were already hiding inside the building. The electric gate was closing tightly, but Luo Yuan could no longer stop the car.

“Bang!”

Came a loud noise, and the electric gate was smashed open.

The jeep careened into the building and stopped only in front of the registration building.

Luo Yuan had no time to attend to his baggage; he only took his knife and jumped out of the car.

The glass door of the registration building was locked from inside. About twenty of the workers were watching in panic at the lobby. When they saw somebody run toward them, they became vigilant.

One of the workers was suddenly delighted. She talked to the

security guards and the door was opened.

Luo Yuan was relieved and quickly walked into the lobby.

“Xiao Luo, why are you here?” a young lady wearing a light grey office wear asked in disbelief.

Luo Yuan was slightly stupefied. He turned and said with surprise, “Sister Huang, aren’t you a policeman at Gaotang? Why are you working here now?”

The person who was speaking was Huang Jiahui. The two of them had met while for Chen Weiqiang at Gaotang. But since then, they didn’t keep in contact.

“The family has been opposing me being a cop. Furthermore, that near escape had somehow ruined my life, so I quit.” Huang Jiahui laughed at herself. “But nobody comes to register now, so it’s quite free here. Maybe I’ll soon be transferred to another department.”

Though Huang Jiahui described it indifferently, Luo Yuan knew that if she didn't have a certain family background, it would be difficult for her to be transferred to another department.

“Both of you are old friends that just met up, but, brother, you just came in from outside, do you know what’s that human face?” a middle aged man, who looked like a leader and had a huge beer belly, asked worriedly after coming over.

“Xiao Luo, this is Manager Sun,” Huang Jiahui introduced.

“Let’s talk about it later!” Luo Yuan stopped the conversation as he felt that the sound outside was getting louder.

The face of manager Sun suddenly turned sour.

Luo Yuan walked toward the glass door, put his hands on the surface and felt numbness through them. The glass door was vibrating in high frequency. The situation was worse than he’d expected. So he turned to Huang Jiahui and said, “It’s not safe here. The glass door will soon break.”

“Brother, are you kidding me? This is bulletproof glass door, how can it break?” manager Sun said, interrupting him.

As soon as he finished his sentence, a huge green colored insect landed like a lightning on the step.

Manager Sun was frightened and drew a step backward.

The shuttle-like shaped insect was covered with a shiny exoskeleton. Its two pairs of hind legs had tapering sharp ends like four thin and sharp blades while all of the front legs’ joints were pulled back into the chest. And from Luo Yuan’s point of view, these front legs appeared to be even more dangerous.

This about one meter long beautiful insect was like a creation of God. However, Luo Yuan couldn't imagine how horrible it would be when it moved.

In the meantime, there were other insects were landing on the steps. And soon, the whole place were filled with insects.

As the buzzing sound outside got louder, the glass continued to vibrate and then the vibration became more violent until the whole glass door started to tinkle. Suddenly, it cracked and a narrow white line appeared on the glass door. Then, there were more and more white lines spreading out like a spider web.

“Ahhh! Help!”

“Run!.”

The people were frightened, and the room into chaos as everyone was trying to escape in a different direction.

“Help me, Xiao Luo!” Huang Jiahui screamed in panic.

“Just follow me,” Luo Yuan roared. He didn't dare to pull Huang Jiahui because he had learned his lesson as he was almost dragged to death last time.

Huang Jiahui followed immediately. Besides her, manager Sun and other five people followed too.

“Any completely sealed room here?” Luo Yuan shouted while running.

“I don’t know.” Huang Jiahui shook her head anxiously. She had just started to work here and wasn't too familiar with the place yet. Besides, how could she recall anything when she was so frightened?

“Fourth floor, there’s a small meeting room at the fourth floor,” a comely girl replied.

When manager Sun saw Luo Yuan run toward the entrance of the staircase, he reminded, “Why don’t we take a lift, we have electricity all the time here.”

“We can’t make it. There are many uncertainties if we take a lift. Besides, many people will think of taking the lift and that will slow us down!” Luo Yuan explained.

Manager Sun agreed. If many people tried to squeeze into the two lifts, it would be another problem of the door being unable to close.

Then there was the sound glass shattering, soon followed by gun shots and screams.

Luo Yuan tensed. He ran toward the staircase and with just a few steps he had already reached the first floor. He actually reduced his

speed on purpose, else the rest wouldn't be able to follow him.

The horrible cries and the calls for help outside urged them to run even faster toward fourth floor.

Manager Sun was panting heavily as he used to drink alcohol which had weakened his body. Normally, he would start gasping for air after walking a short distance, but now he even had to climb the staircase. When he reach the second floor, he had already fallen behind.

“Manager Sun, let me help you,” a young man said, looking back and stopping immediately to help manager Sun.

“Good, good! Xiao Chen, you are good. Thankfully I didn't misjudge you.” Manager Sun said breathlessly, patting his shoulder.

That young man called Xiao Chen was happy to be praised and quickly pulled manager Sun up the staircase.

Suddenly, the window of the third floor shattered and the pieces of glass slid off the staircase like drops of rain.

Manager Sun accidentally stepped on the sliding pieces of glass, his body slanted and he slumped on the floor. The next moment, he sprang up like he'd gotten an electric shock as his butt was pricked by the pieces of glass and bled.

“Are you alright, manager Sun?” Xiao Chen tried to stifle a laugh.

Manager Sun waved his hand with an agonized face. “Why’s this window broke only at this very hour? Please, help me pull out these pieces of glass first. Ouch, it’s painful.”

Xiao Chen pulled out a few large pieces while manager Sun yelled in pain. Then, Xiao Chen said, “Manager Sun, let’s go first and settle the rest later.”

Xiao Chen was looking at the broken window worriedly as he feared that the insect would come in anytime. As soon as he finished his sentence, he was scared that manager Sun would be displeased with him and continued to explain, “Since we don’t have any medicine right now, we may not able to clean them up completely.”

“Alright!” Manager Sun knew it wasn't the right time to do it now. As the others had run far, he became anxious and said, “Let’s go faster.”

But neither of them was aware that a giant beetle had silently come in through the window and swiftly landed on the floor.

Chapter 26: Trapped

“Where’s that?” Luo Yuan climbed up to the fourth floor and asked.

“It’s just further ahead, near the washroom along the walkway,” the pretty girl said while gasping. She could not wait to lie down on the floor.

They ran another 50-60 meters and came back to the entrance of the small meeting room. “Oh shit! We don’t have the key!” Huang Jiahui became a little disappointed.

“It’s fine.” Luo Yuan checked the door and realized it was a sturdy wooden door, he then lowered one of his shoulders and slammed against it.

“Bang!”

The door burst open.

They entered the small meeting room which was about 60 square meters wide. It seemed like a small classroom instead. Luo Yuan took a look at the surroundings and quickly moved a few tables to block the entrance. The room immediately became darker.

Huang Jiahui switched on the lights and the exhaust fan and then leaned on the chair. “It’s so tiring. How come Sun Zhuren and Shen are not back yet? Qian Qian, since you were behind us, did

you see them?" Only then did she realize that there were two people missing.

"They were at the back. Sun Zhuren was walking together with Shen Xiu, and they should be here soon," Cao Qianqian said, trying his best to recall what he'd seen.

"Shen Xiu is good at bootlicking, huh. He even remembered to do so at this time," a guy wearing a lattice shirt said, frowning.

"Zhao Tianming, it'd better if you could say something good instead of being sarcastic. You can do the same if you want to excel," Cao Qianqian could not take his sarcasm and scolded him.

"Just stop talking, don't bring the insects here!" Huang Jiahui interrupted them.

Both of them quickly shut up and suddenly they heard footsteps. Cao Qianqian was happy and tried to move away the tables.

Luo Yuan stopped her and said, "Don't move, this is not the footsteps of a human."

The sound was clear and regular like someone hitting the floor with a nail at a certain frequency. All of them became pale.

"Just stay here first, there is only one green bug outside, so we are relatively safe now." He thought they were going to stay there until the bugs left. However, something in his mind changed his

plan.

“E-Level Mission triggered”

“Mission: Kill 10 Green Bugs!”

“Time length: 3 days. (Accept/Decline)”

The system sent him a mission. “Damn! Are you trying to kill me?” Luo Yuan cursed angrily, but he accepted the mission. He was just one step away from being ranked Level 5. He would get upgraded immediately once he completed the mission regardless of him gaining one or five bonus skill points. All his skills would get a big upgrade if he could kill all the bugs. Besides that, he could not just decline the mission as he was already in this situation. If he needed to fight anyway, might as well just accept the mission.

The footsteps were getting closer to them and nearer to the door. The sound suddenly stopped and everyone held their breath. Nobody dared to move, it almost felt like the air had frozen too.

The next second, there was a sharp and irritating sound coming from the door, it sounded like the bug was scratching at the door with a piece of metal. The other thing that made all of them collapse in fear was that another bug was also walking toward the meeting room.

“What now, Yuan?” Huang Jiahui asked Luo Yuan as she knew he was stronger than anyone else in the room and was also the only person carrying a weapon.

Luo Yuan thought for a moment and then said, “I don’t think the door can last long, so we need to kill the two bugs outside. Otherwise, we’ll be killed when they come in here.”

“Don’t open the door! You want us to die?” Zhao Tianming screamed out in a low voice. “They won’t be able to come in. We have many people here and there are many tables blocking the door.”

“Yes, you’re right! We should move the tables there, hurry up!” Cao Qianqian refused to take the risk and quickly moved some tables over. Zhao Tianming also helped her carry the tables.

Luo Yuan was conflicted as he needed to kill the green bugs and complete the mission and he knew there was a good opportunity to catch them one by one outside. However, he also knew the bugs would definitely rush into the room if the door was opened. He worried that they would then hurt or even kill the staff. He hesitated to sacrifice those innocent people just for the sake of completing the mission. Although he had changed compared to the time before animal mutation, but he was still not a cold-blooded person.

“Why are you still standing there? Come and move the table!” Zhao Tianming said as he saw Luo Yuan just standing there and doing nothing. Luo Yuan didn’t want to argue with him and proceeded to help them. “Keep holding a knife and pretending!”

Zhao Tianming whispered when Luo Yuan walked toward them.

Nobody knew whether he'd said it intentionally as Cao Qianqian could hear it even though she was standing at the far end. Luo Yuan looked serious and stopped, he turned around and walked towards Zhao Tianming.

He wasn't a calculative person or someone who couldn't take any criticism. But the main problem was a person like Zhao Tianming could be a bomb that could exploded at any time when everyone was busy fighting together.

"What do you want to do?" Zhao Tianming asked fiercely.

"Xiao Luo, please calm down. Zhao Tianming, quickly apologize." Huang Jiahui knew Luo Yuan had learned martial arts before and he could easily kill Zhao Tianming.

"Why should I apologize? I didn't say anything wrong." Zhao Tianming refused to apologize.

"Don't worry, I just wanted to tell him a story," Luo Yuan said, stopping Huang Jiahui. "I think you probably aren't aware of this, but ten days ago there were around seven gangsters who challenged me like you just did. I used my knife to chop off their heads and hands. Yesterday, someone shot me from behind and I chopped off his hand and then poked through his stomach. Even cut his intestines. So do you want to try your luck?" Luo Yuan asked Zhao Tianming.

Luo Yuan's coldness and his obvious killing intent made Zhao Tianming terrified. He felt as if his heart was squeezed tightly and his legs were numb. He didn't even realize his shirt was wet. Zhao Tianming could actually be better off but Luo Yuan had intentionally scared him to teach him a lesson. He was just an ordinary person so the pressure was enough to make him collapse.

"Please remember, if you don't have the guts to fight, then don't challenge others. Otherwise, you will die terribly," Luo Yuan said.

"You, you've killed people before?" Cao Qianqian immediately felt regret and didn't dare to look at Luo Yuan. These people used to work in the government sector and had received sufficient food supply to live a stable life. Those things made their minds stay in the past even if they were aware of the current chaos. None of them really understood what was happening outside.

"There are so many people dying in the city, so who cares if they are being killed by mutated animals or by human beings?" Luo Yuan said, turning around to look at her.

Cao Qianqian was frightened and remained silent.

"I think that's enough, don't scare her anymore," Huang Jiahui urged him. She then turned around and talked to Cao Qianqian. "He was trying to protect himself, and self-protection is legalized according to the Law."

If one had a crush on the other, the bad things they did would not affect their feelings. Huang Jiahui didn't realize that she was in a

good mood from the moment Luo Yuan came. After a while, there were more and more footsteps drawing closer to them until they could no longer identify how many more bugs were outside. The corridor was very noisy.

The strong wooden door was shaking repeatedly. A long, sharp, and semi-transparent leg slipped in through a newly made gap in the door. Cao Qianqian covered her mouth and the tears rolled down from her eyes.

Luo Yuan immediately pushed against the door as he saw the scene and the bug's leg got stuck but did not break. The leg seemed to be quite strong.

“You, come and push the door.” Luo Yuan instructed Zhao Tianming. He was quite obedient after being threatened by Luo Yuan and quickly walked over and followed what he was told to do. Human beings were almost always the same, they liked to bully the nice people but were scared of the fierce ones. They didn't listen when others talked nicely to them. However, they would be very obedient and follow all the instructions once their life was threatened.

Luo Yuan waited for Zhao Tianming to press on the door. He took out the Zhanmadao and sliced the bug's leg. Surprisingly, the bug's leg wasn't broken even by the sharp knife. Luo Yuan only managed to cut half of the bug's leg before feeling exhausted. This was way harder than the time when he bumped into the king of the rats. The green bug was triggered by the pain and produced some weird sound which sounded like boiling water. The insect crazily banged the door with a great force. Luo Yuan pulled back the knife

and chopped at the same spot again. Finally, he managed to break off the leg!

He picked up the long green leg, which looked slightly different from the bug’s body. The leg was semi-transparent and shiny, and looked very strong. People might think it was an emerald if they didn’t know it had come from a bug. Luo Yuan didn’t use much strength and the sharp leg cut into the wooden table. It was easy imaginable that it would be very easy to use this to pierce into a human body.

Luo Yuan used his super power to identify the bug’s leg.

“Sharp leg from a green bug.”

“Function: Material.”

“Rarity: Light Blue”

“Weight: 50 grams”

“Comment: It’s very strong and sharp, perhaps you can make it into a weapon.”

“Light Blue!”

Although he has been prepared psychologically, Luo Yuan still couldn't hold his temper when he confirmed the difficulty of this mission. A light blue creature again, and this time there were several of them. The light blue creature seemed to be less valuable now? Why were there so many required for an E-mission?

In fact, it was really not easy for him to complete this mission. It was similar to him killing ten king rats or ten big snakes. He felt hopeless when he thought about it. He pulled out the sharp leg and passed it to Huang Jiahui. "Hui, you hold this for self-protection."

Huang Jiahui was a police officer before and her mental condition was stronger than that of an ordinary person. If it had to be justified with a number then her determination level should be around 10-11 which was stronger than what normal people possessed. This should make her braver than the other two during a critical moment.

Huang Jiahui took the sharp leg and said, "Thanks!"

Zhao Tianming and Cao Qianqian envied her but they didn't say anything as both of them weren't as close to Luo Yuan.

The green bug kept banging the door and producing the weird sound.

"Bang! Bang! Bang!"

Zhao Tianming seemed to be giving up as he sweated a lot and

said, “I’m exhausted, I don’t think I can’t continue. Cao Qianqian, please help.”

Cao Qianqian peeped at Luo Yuan and then looked at Huang Jiahui, only then did she walk over hesitantly.

“Wait!” Luo Yuan seemed to have an idea. “I don’t think this is a good way and it can’t be sustained for long. Jiahui and Qianqian please stay back, while Zhao Tianming, you don’t push too hard so that this bug can enter and I can kill it.”

“Luo Yuan, do you really think you can manage this?” Zhao Tianming wanted to reject but he did not dare to do so.

"Don't worry, I don't simply make a decision if I can't handle it," Luo Yuan replied.

Zhao Tianming felt slightly relieved and told himself inside, “The worst thing that could happen is death, chill!” He slowly released the door and the gap begun to grow. A cable-like antenna came into the room first, and then the bug pushed against the door to make the gap bigger. It began to push the head in as well. It looked like a complicated robot, which freaked them out.

Zhao Tianming slowly boosted his courage and prepared to escape. At that moment, he suddenly saw a beam of light cross in front of him followed by very strange sound.

“Close the door!”

Zhao Tianming immediately slammed it shut when he heard Luo Yuan's shout. He turned around and pressed on the table with his back. He slowly sat down on the floor and stayed stationary.

Chapter 27: Bomb

“Not bad!” Luo Yuan said.

Zhao Tianming was surprised by the compliment. He got up from the ground and bowed down slightly. He never did that even in front of his superiors. However, the second phrase from Luo Yuan was truly horrifying.

“Please do what you did just now when the bugs come again.”

Zhao Tianming didn't dare to reject and forcefully said, “Alright.”

Luo Yuan didn't bother with his sincerity. What mattered was that he could follow what Luo Yuan said. He walked toward the head of the green bug and saw some greenish liquid all over the floor. It smelled pungent.

Luo Yuan chopped off the green bug's head while its body was outside the door. The mouth of the head was still moving even after being detached from the body. Luo Yuan used his knife to tap on its eyes and heard a sound-

“Png! Png”.

It was like knocking on a rock.

Huang Jihui walked closer to Luo Yuan and squatted beside him. “Wow! Its eyes are so beautiful, its like there are a few little stars inside,” she said.

Cao Qianqian hesitated but still went closer to check it out. She was afraid but also curious about the insect’s head.

Luo Yuan suddenly got up.

“What’s wrong?” Huang Jiahui asked nervously.

Luo Yuan tried to focus and listened carefully. “More are coming, a total of four bugs! Watch out!” he warned them.

Cao Qianqian was shocked while Zhao Tianming became very pale. One was bad enough but now there were four!

“Jiahui, Cao Qianqian and Zhao Tianming, all of you please press against the door. We should follow the plan that Tianming did just now. Let them come in one by one and then leave them to me,” Luo Yuan instructed them. He was only shaken by the first attacker and was now in control of the situation.

"Alright!" Cao Qianqian replied.

“Xiao Luo, are you sure? There are four of them,” Huang Jiahui asked anxiously.

“As long as the door isn't broken, four is almost the same as one. Therefore, you must hold the door properly, and if they really break in, you better pray they are all vegetarian.”

Cao Qianqian was badly frightened and her body begun to shake. She might have collapsed if Huang Jiahui didn't support her.

The four bugs were hungry and very soon they arrived at the doorstep. It was natural for them to hunt for food even if there was dead corpse of their buddy lying in the way. One of the huge ones squeezed through its friends and slipped its head between the gap where the blade was just right above its head. The bug desperately chewed the internal organs of its buddy.

The other three made way for the aggressive one and attacked the other parts of the body. They easily broke the shell and a lot of greenish liquid spilled everywhere. The big bug was eaten by its buddies. In less than a minute, there was nothing left.

Apparently, a green bug wasn't enough for the four of them, and their antennas sensed something more delicious. One of the bigger bugs raised its head and made a sound.

"Glu, glu."

It then poked through the wooden door and made a loud explosive noise. The next second, its legs hit the wall and left four holes in it.

The door was hit hard, and the other green bugs also did the same. However, the wooden door was too small for all the green bugs. It could only fit two. So two of the less dominant bugs were left anxiously waiting behind, their legs continuously scratching the floor tiles. This created a lot of long and deep marks.

The door kept opening and closing as both the bugs and the humans were trying to open and close the door at the same time. That was a battle for survival in which the defeated party was going to die.

However, after a while, the gap got bigger as most of them were exhausted. "I can't continue anymore, I have no more energy," Cao Qianqian cried out in fear.

"Please be persistent if you don't want to die. Otherwise, the bugs will come in!" Zhao Tianming tried to convince her. "Don't panic, relax... relax..."

Luo Yuan tried his best to calm down and held his knife tightly. Perhaps fear could help to unleash some powerful skills but it could also cause one to feel numb and stunned for a long period of time. If Luo Yuan also expressed this emotions, the other three would not be able to continue fighting. He knew all of them would die once the four bugs broke into the meeting room.

Cao Qianqian felt slightly better and more energetic. Suddenly, there was a strong force hitting the door which left a big hole in it. Two bugs from the group immediately squeezed into the room and everyone began to scream. Cao Qianqian was horrified and fell to the ground. Yellowish liquid dripped onto her body and it smelled

awful. It was beyond everyone's expectations to fight two bugs at the same time.

Luo Yuan felt numbness in his back but quickly lifted his knife and then attacked the weak spots of one of the bugs. The first bug was busy looking for more food and neglected Luo Yuan's existence which caused it to lose its life. It screamed out its pain but could barely move anymore. Luo Yuan immediately went closer and struck its back to make a long and deep wound.

The other bug noticed that something was wrong. It shook its body and extended two of its forelimbs.

“Png!”

The action of its forelimbs extending made a sound which caused Luo Yuan to become dizzy. He tried to evade the forelimbs of the bug as they struck at his chest and scratched the snakeskin vest. All its scales shattered into small pieces and fell to the floor. And now the snakeskin bulletproof vest owned by Luo Yuan was exposed.

Only Huang Jiahui was still conscious and yelled, “Close the door! Close the door!”

Zhao Tianming looked at the two green bugs in the room and shivered. He quickly pushed the door and closed it. Cao Qianqian also quickly got up from the ground. It was felt like a long time but the whole scene had happened in only a few seconds.

The bug which had been attacked by Luo Yuan was furious. Luo Yuan rushed to the bug again with his knife and attacked its left shoulder before it could even respond. The bug almost split into two pieces and finally fell to the floor.

Luo Yuan felt relieved for a second. However, he realized the other bug wasn't dead yet and immediately gave it another strike to kill it. He breathed heavily from exhaustion.

Although the fight was just a few seconds of work, it was a very dangerous battle which required his full concentration. They would've all died if he'd been careless.

The three were doing their very best to hold the door when they noticed the room was quiet. That made them tense up. The two arrogant bugs were lying in a puddle of greenish liquid, slaughtered in a way they were almost split in two.

Everyone was amazed as they looked at Luo Yuan who was breathing heavily while leaning against the wall. Huang Jiahui couldn't believe that Luo Yuan had just killed the two crazy bugs so easily.

“Luo... Yuan, shall we let the other two enter the room?” Zhao Tianming suddenly asked.

“Let them in, but one by one. If I had reacted just a bit slower, we would have died,” Luo Yuan said calmly.

Cao Qianqian felt shameful and said, "I'm sorry." If she hadn't taken a rest, the door wouldn't have opened and the bugs wouldn't have come in.

Luo Yuan wanted to scold her very badly but if he did it now, then it would be bad for the situation. He helplessly shook his head and said, "I believe most people would react that way, be more careful next time."

Cao Qianqian was very grateful and the way she viewed Luo Yuan changed slightly. Perhaps the presence of Luo Yuan could help boost the courage and confidence of these people.

Things got smoother after that and the other two bugs didn't create any big problems under the supervision of the three of them. Luo Yuan managed to kill the two bugs. All of their dead bodies were dragged into the meeting room to avoid attracting more bugs.

Huang Jiahui sat down on a bench and saw a puddle of water further in the room. She asked, "Is there any water in the room? I'm thirsty."

Zhao Tianming knew what was going on just now and said, "Oops, I think you can try asking Qianqian."

Cao Qianqian was too embarrassed to reply and quickly took off her blazer to cover her lower body.

Huang Jiahui immediately understood what had happened and stared at Zhao Tianming. “Female urinary tracts are shorter than men’s, and that’s why we can’t hold it for too long. Is that a problem? You weren’t performing as good as the females just now, too,” Huang Jiahui scolded him.

Zhao Tianming didn't dare to mess with Huang Jiahui and quickly said, “I was just trying to lighten the atmosphere.”

Suddenly, all of them heard the sound of a bomb and they could feel its vibration. Huang Jiahui was shocked and quickly got up from the bench. She dialed her phone a few times but no one picked up on the other side. She looked very pale.

Zhao Tianming and Cao Qianqian took out their phones to call as well, but similarly, no one answered their calls. They became anxious.

“What do you think is happening outside?” Huang Jiahui asked Luo Yuan.

Luo Yuan shook his head and said, “Don’t ask me, I have no idea.”

Such a big group of bugs had arrived in Donghu city, who would be willing to believe they were just passing by. The whole city had already collapsed. It was no different from hell.

Chapter 28: Death Seeker

The sound of the bomb faded after half an hour, but Luo Yuan felt cold instead of being relieved. It wasn't easy to vanish such a big group of bugs in a short period of time. The only possible explanation could be that Donghu City was defeated and was now controlled by the bugs. And a helpless city would be like a huge abandoned granary to the bugs. That was why Luo Yuan felt anxious and sick.

The security during the war was always a fragile and unstable thing. It was likely to be easily destroyed, just like those sand arts at the beach. Perhaps the only way for Luo Yuan to feel safe again was to get himself upgraded. He only had to kill another five bugs to complete the mission. A property point and five skill bonus points would be enough to upgrade his overall power, and then he would no longer need to be afraid of those bugs.

He couldn't continue staying in the room once he thought about upgrading himself and said, "I'm going out, are you coming with me?"

Zhao Tianming asked, "Brother Luo, it's very dangerous outside and here is safer for us. Why would you want to leave?"

"I don't want to stay here forever!" Luo Yuan replied.

Cao Qianqian got up slowly and said, "I, I want to follow you!"

She understood that Luo Yuan was the only reason why they

were all still alive. If he insisted on leaving and Cao Qianqian wanted to stay alive, then it was best to follow him. Besides that, the room wasn't safe anymore with the broken door. The green bugs might come anytime and the three of them would not be able to fight them off without Luo Yuan.

"Xiao Luo, could you, could you send me home? My daughter is alone at home," Huang Jiahui begged him.

Luo Yuan shook his head. He noted Hung Jiahui's hopelessness and calmly added, "We can't go now. There are many bugs outside, so it's too dangerous. We'll have to wait until the bugs leave."

Huang Jiahui teared up and quickly said, "Thank you so much! I really don't know what I can do for you. I really appreciate it!" Luo Yuan had left a very good impression on her as he had once taken a risk to search for his housemate in the forest which might have costed him his life. She knew that people similar to Luo Yuan were almost extinct, hence she believed in him even if he didn't make any promises.

"Just a small matter. I believe your daughter will be fine," Luo Yuan said, waving his hand.

Cao Qianqian had also considered asking Luo Yuan to send her home. However, she just moved her lips for a few seconds but didn't ask for it. She wasn't as close as Huang Jiahui to him and she couldn't find any reason for him to send her home. When she thought about this, she seemed to be jealous on Huang Jiahui and blamed herself on not knowing Luo Yuan earlier.

The two women were willing to follow Luo Yuan, and Zhao Tianming would definitely not stay here alone.

Once the leaving problem was solved, Luo Yuan chopped off a few sharp legs from the green bugs and gave it to them as weapons. Those legs from the green bugs were the strongest part of their bodies and were even stronger than some of the metals. It was really a miracle, knowing that it came from a mutated animal.

When everything was ready, Luo Yuan tried to listen to what was happening outside the door. He told Zhao Tianming to move away the tables once he confirmed that there were no more bugs in the corridor. Zhao Tianming happily did as told and opened the door. Luo Yuan checked again before stepping out and realized the fifth floor was empty as he didn't see any bugs there. He turned back and said, "Let's go! This floor seems to be safe, so we should go down to the other one and see!"

"Brother Luo, can I go to the toilet first?" Cao Qianqian asked shyly as her pants were wet and made her feel uncomfortable.

Luo Yuan nodded his head and said, "Anyone else who wants to go to the toilet please hurry up! And also be careful as the green bugs might fly in through the windows."

Zhao Tianming wanted to go but he canceled his plans after listening to what Luo Yuan said just now.

Cao Qianqian was a scared of the bugs as well but she really

needed to clean herself. In the end, she forced herself to enter the toilet and then came out quickly after cleaning up.

Luo Yuan looked at her for a few seconds as she took off her pants and wrapped herself with the big blazer. However, the blazer was just enough to cover her butt and pubic region, leaving her fair legs exposed which caught the attention of Luo Yuan.

Cao Qianqian sensed his gaze and felt shy but happy. She then looked at Luo Yuan for a moment. She always felt proud about her legs as she used to take good care of them. Huang Jiahui was quite old and couldn't defeat her here. Cao Qianqian walked toward Luo Yuan, and tried to talk to him. "Brother Luo, what are we going to do at the 3rd floor?"

"We are going to kill the green bugs since we can't stay in this f*cking place forever. We need to go home," Luo Yuan said calmly.

Cao Qianqian admired him as she felt a guy like Luo Yuan was a real man. Most of the people tried their best to avoid the green bugs but Luo Yuan took the initiative to kill them. And then, she had a crush on Luo Yuan.

"Even if Luo Yuan pushed her down on the floor now, she would just go with the flow," Zhao Tianming speculated after noticing the scene. His heart burned but he lowered his head, trying to hide his emotions. The four of them walked to the end of the staircase and stayed alert.

The walkway was very quiet, but after taking a few steps they

heard someone screaming downstairs. Very soon that person screamed out in pain and they could hear gunfire.

“There are people on the third floor, let’s go,” Luo Yuan said. He immediately rushed to the third floor and saw a woman covered in blood run toward him.

“Lan Lan, what’s happening?” Cao Qianqian asked, covering her mouth.

The woman lifted her head up and upon seeing someone she knew, she immediately shouted out, “Qianqian, run! Hurry up! There are green bugs!”

She didn't intend to stop and wanted to continue running, however, Luo Yuan stopped her by holding her arm and she immediately struggled crazily. “Ahhhh! Why are you holding me!? Let me go! Let me go!”

Luo Yuan was annoyed when he saw her trying to attack him. He then pushed her onto the floor and said, “Cao Qianqian, you take care of her then.”

Zhang Lan quickly got up from the ground and wanted to run away but Cao Qianqian pulled her back. The woman almost went crazy and shouted, "Are you guys crazy? I've told you there are bugs! Don't drag me along if you want to die!"

"Pakk!"

Huang Jiahui walked toward her and gave her a slap. “You shut up now!” Huang Jiahui told Zhang Lan to keep quiet.

The woman was stunned and stopped struggling, then began to cry. “All of you are bad people! Chen Xueyan is dead, and our security guard is also dead. All of them are dead, and it’s my turn now! I don’t want to die!”

“Can you ask her how many bugs are there?” Luo Yuan asked.

Only when Zhang Lan calmed down did she realize all of them were holding a green stick which looked very familiar, though she couldn't recall where she'd seen that object before. Besides that, all of them didn't seem to be afraid, especially the guy who had talked to Cao Qianqian. He looked very calm and confident, so was probably the leader of the group.

She was quite smart and didn't wait for Cao Qianqian to ask and said, “There were two, they came in from the window but I locked them inside the Integrated Management Office.”

“You guys wait here and I’ll go check on it,” Luo Yuan said.

“Brother Luo, let me follow you. Perhaps I can help when you need it.” Zhao Tianming knew it wouldn’t be safe to stay there, so he might as well follow Luo Yuan.

“No, thanks. I’m worried I can’t take care of you,” Luo Yuan

rejected.

He then walked away with his knife. After just a few minutes of walking, Luo Yuan already heard the sound of bones being chewed. He slowed down his footsteps and walked carefully, even slowing down his breathing. He arrived at the doorstep of a room and saw some reddish brown liquid flow out from the door gap at the bottom. It smelled awful, and he quickly stepped back.

He raised his head and looked at the signboard, “Integrated Management Department”.

“I see. It’s here. Luckily that lady remembered to close the door, so at least I can prepare myself before attacking the bugs.” He was actually still afraid when he recalled the dangerous scene of him fighting two bugs at the same time. He took a deep breath and then banged at the door. Both of the bugs were having a feast beside a dead body each. They were both shocked by the loud sound produced by Luo Yuan. At first, they stepped back and became alert. However, they relaxed when they found out that it was just a better food, someone alive.

One of the bugs screamed happily and left no longer fresh food behind. The other one didn't respond and continued its feast in the corner.

It was quite pitiful of them not to know the differences between different types of food. Some food was soft and easy to chew, while another could be very hard and break one’s teeth. Luo Yuan was slightly relieved when he saw only one bug trying to attack. He instantly took his knife and struck on the bug's head before it could

respond.

The bug fell onto the floor and kept shaking for a while. Luo Yuan immediately brought his knife along and rushed toward the other bug which was still eating a dead body. The bug was shocked when it noticed Luo Yuan, but it was too late for it to respond. He wanted to attack Luo Yuan but Luo Yuan's knife was already cutting through its mouth, brain, and forelimbs.

Luo Yuan pulled out his knife from the mouth of the bug and tried to clean off the greenish liquid. He whispered, "Three more to go." He looked at the dead bodies on the floor, a male and a female. Both of their abdomens were opened and the intestines were flowing out.

The female one was still alive, her eyes wide open and tears rolling down her cheeks. She was mumbling softly but when she opened her mouth to speak, a mouthful of black blood gushed out. She smiled pitifully and begged him with her eyes.

"I'm sorry, there's nothing I can do for you." Luo Yuan sighed as he knew there'd be no difference even if he sent her to the hospital.

The woman shook her head and he noticed she was drawing something on the floor with her finger. She was trying to deliver a message. Luo Yuan bent down and checked, the word was slanted but he could still read it, it was the character for death.

She wanted him to end the pain.

Luo Yuan agreed, "Alright!" The woman grinned and closed her eyes. Luo Yuan took a deep breath and aimed for the spot where her heart was, but then he hesitated.

He had killed at least seven to eight people before, but this woman was different. Perhaps Luo Yuan respected life and didn't want to kill someone who was innocent. His forehead was sweaty and his hand shook as he was suffered trying to make the decision. When he was about to force himself, the woman had already died.

Luo Yuan was relieved. He noticed there was a gun nearby and picked it up. He also found a few bullets on the dead body of the security guard. He then left the room with his new possessions.

Chapter 29: Energy

Zhang Lan was slowly starting to feel better and was talking with Cao Qianqian when Luo Yuan returned. She was apparently amazed by what Cao Qianqian had told her was real.

“Settled?” Huang Jiahui asked.

“Yes. Unfortunately, those people inside the room were already dead. This is the gun from the security guard, take it.” Luo Yuan threw the gun to Huang Jiahui together with the bullets.

Huang Jiahui operated the gun and inserted the bullets into it. She then did an aiming pose and said, “I haven’t touched a gun for such a long time!”

“Oh sister, you’ve learned to fire before?” Zhao Tianming asked her respectfully with some curiosity as he knew she must have learned before to operate the gun professionally.

“I was a cop before recently being transferred here,” Huang Jiahui said, lifting her head up.

“You’re amazing! I should have learned to use the gun too! I had no idea the world would come to this.” Cao Qianqian sighed with envy.

“Alright, let’s go to check the second floor,” Luo Yuan said, interrupting them.

They saw a big puddle of blood when they arrived at second floor and a few leftover fingers with a bunch of grayish intestines. The group became pale from disgusted. Cao Qianqian saw a finger with a ring on it which looked very familiar. "Is that the ring of Sun Zhuren?" she asked.

"I don't think he is still alive," Zhao Tianming said gloomily.

"That's enough." Huang Jiahui was pale and she covered her mouth, quickly following Luo Yuan.

"Hold on, you guys step back a little," Luo Yuan suddenly said. He was ahead of everyone but stopped after taking a turn. "There is a green bug still there."

All of them were scared and quickly ran back to the third floor. All besides Huang Jiahui who lifted her gun and remained in her place.

"Why are you still standing there? Move!" Luo Yuan turned around and stared at Huang Jiahui.

"I can kill a green bug also!" Huang Jiahui insisted with a pale face.

"Look at yourself, it's gonna be good enough if you don't create any problems," Luo Yuan said angrily as he knew she would only get in the way.

“I promise I won’t create troubles.” Huang Jiahui thought of the horrible snake incident earlier and motivated herself. She said, “I was a second runner-up during the shooting competition organized by the city public security council. Please, don't look down on me.”

That was unbelievable to Luo Yuan. However, in fact, he had not seen her fire before, so he wasn’t sure if that was true or not.

“Fine. Since you want to follow me, don’t regret if you are eaten by a bug,” Luo Yuan said, mad. When she was about to reply, Luo Yuan made a sign for her to remain silent and Huang Jiahui could only obey his instructions.

The bug was disturbed and it slowly crawled upward. Suddenly, it grew bigger.

“Bang! Bang! Bang!”

Huang Jiahui’s hands were shaking and she could not stop pressing on the gun’s trigger .

The green bug was stunned and stepped back as the bullets hit it. There were a lot of greenish liquid gushing out from its body but none of the bullets had hit any of the weak points. The green bug stepped on an empty space and rolled off the staircase to the lower floor after being shot by three bullets.

Luo Yuan would definitely not let it go. He took a leap and

jumped down to the lower floor with his knife. He increased his speed and rushed toward the bug to kill it in a flash.

The sound of gunfire had attracted more bugs. There were three of them crawling over once they heard the noise.

“F*ck!” Luo Yuan was extremely mad when he thought about how Huang Jiahui always made things worse. Though, he hadn’t expected it to happen so soon. He quickly turned back as the three green bugs were too overwhelming and he could only try to escape. “Run!” Luo Yuan yelled at Huang Jiahui. She didn't run but instead inserted more bullets into her gun.

“What are you doing? Run!” Luo Yuan was really mad and didn’t bother with her anymore. He knew he would die if she continued to be like this. He took a leap over her head and ran toward the third floor. Huang Jiahui lifted the gun and aimed at the corner next to the staircase. A bug was coming close to it and Huang Jiahui immediately fired a shot at its chest. Then the second bullet hit its eye. The bug shook for a few seconds and collapsed. Luo Yuan turned around and looked at her. He was wondering whether that should be considered lucky.

No matter what, Huang Jiahui had helped him a lot. He was confident in killing two bugs. He brought his knife along and walked to the second floor, waiting the corner. Another bug was slaughtered when it tried to peep. He then killed the last bug in the building. The system beeped when the last bug was killed.

“Beep!”

“E-Mission completed”

“Time consumption: 1 hour and 35 minutes”

“Comment: Excellent!”

“Basic experience reward: 800”

“Comment reward: +800”

“You have leveled up and been awarded 1 property point and 5 skill points. Your current level is level 5!”

“Your energy and injuries will be recovered!”

“Finally I’ve upgraded!” Luo Yuan was excited and he opened the properties panel.

Character: Luo Yuan

Occupation: Hunter

Level: 5

Experience: 900/4800

Attributes:-

Energy: 11 (10)

Dexterity: 12 (10)

Physique: 11 (10)

Intelligence: 13 (10)

Sensitivity: 11 (10)

Determination: 12 (10)

Skills: Science 16, Mathematics 14, Mandarin 19, English 16, Finance 17,

Programming 9, Dancing 1, Painting 3, Gaming 6, Negotiation 9, Social 7,

Culinary 3, Driving 1, Hand-to-hand Combat 5, Knife Skills, 14 .

Special Technique Skill: Object Identification, Integration

Unassigned Properties Point: 1

Unassigned Technique Point: 5

Luo Yuan read carefully through a lot of new information regarding integration which appeared in his mind when he saw the integration technique in the properties panel.

“Integration Technique: Integrate two objects based on a core object.” Luo Yuan quickly grasped it as the message was simple and easy to understand. It was similar to “strengthening” in online games and could be used on equipment. Perhaps if he could find a strong alloy, then his knife could be upgraded too! In some ways, it could be considered as a superpower as well.

However, he didn’t have any time to test and could only put it aside. The most important thing right now was to assign his property points which had to go to his dexterity. He always believed in dexterity being very important since if he could react faster, it would also increase his attack power, as well as fighting flexibility.

However, he hesitated.

He realized that focusing on a single property or skill was a mistake. He remembered how he’d felt helpless in many battles before when he wanted to increase his speed, but couldn’t do so because of his physical condition. Right now he had 12-points in

dexterity which meant he was 2.25 times faster than an ordinary person. That's why he should be able to act faster, but unfortunately, things did not go the way he wanted them to.

He guessed that even if he assigned more points to dexterity, it would not help much with his physical condition. He hesitated for quite a while and, in the end, assigned the property points to 'Energy'. Once it was done, he immediately felt the heat circulating inside his body, and his muscles were shrinking and expanding. After a while, his muscles became more firm and all the flabby fat was gone. The muscles on his back and chest became more firm. The whole process took only about two seconds and then he was back to normal.

Previously, he had looked quite buff as he used to work out and train himself. However, he became skinnier now and was lucky that he was wearing a shirt. Otherwise, he'd scare away the people around him once they noticed an extreme change in his body size.

Huang Jiahui looked at him with a weird look but she couldn't tell what had changed. She just felt odd.

Chapter 30: Vehicle Acquisition

Luo Yuan didn't care about how Huang Jiahui looked at him as he was immersed in the changes. He held his fist and they could hear the bone cracking sound. He felt energetic and powerful, and his muscles were super active. He realized that his body had become lighter, and he believed he could act faster now than what he had imagined.

That's right! One must have all properties to excel or he or she won't be able to go far while only focusing on improving a specific skill.

"Xiao Luo, are you alright?" Huang Jiahui asked Luo Yuan, feeling strange.

"I'm fine. I just wanted to say I've never felt so good before," Luo Yuan replied while he tried to hide his excitement. He didn't rush to assign the other five technique points to his knife skill. He was already confident in fighting the green bugs after upgrading his energy.

Besides that, it was easier to upgrade the skill while its level was low. He planned to practice more with his knife to upgrade its skill since it was still quite low and only assign the points to when it reached Level 15. He couldn't wait to see the changes when his knife skill reached Level 20.

"Sister Huang, could you please ask them to come down? I'll stay here to check whether there are any more bugs left," Luo Yuan

said.

“Alright!” Huang Jiahui replied. She was confident she could kill the bugs after the battle earlier. She checked on her gun and refilled it with a few bullets, then walked to the third floor.

After she left, Luo Yuan took a deep breath and ran forward. His face vibrated while he ran and at his surroundings were moving backward. He took only a few seconds to reach the end of the corridor.

He gasped and looked back, he'd ran about 50 meters. Based on the trial run just now, he assumed it would take about 8 seconds for him to finish 100 meters and that is what he was supposed to achieve with 12 points in dexterity. However, he did realize that it consumed a lot of energy. He was already gasping for air even though he'd only ran for such a short distance.

It seemed like the 11 points of energy wasn't enough to support his activities. It was like an upgraded device without sufficient power supply; it couldn't sustain for long.

Anyway, it wasn't a big deal for now as most of the battles only lasted for a few seconds. It wasn't like a combat competition which required the players to fight for a long period of time or compete in several rounds. Luo Yuan was using a knife which could cause severe injuries or kill immediately. It wasn't similar to the ancient battles which could last for a few days or months.

There was a broken window at the end of the corridor, and when

he looked through it, he saw many bugs flying above in the sky which made him feel disgusted. However, it was better compared to the arrival of a big bunch of bugs earlier. But for some reason he didn't think it was a good sign as the green bugs might have landed in the city center.

A while later, Cao Qianqian and Zhao Tianming came along and were stunned when they saw the scene.

“Ning Ning!”

Huang Jiahui dialed her phone. Someone picked up the call very fast and Huang Jiahui shouted, “Ning Ning! Are you alright? It’s okay, don’t be afraid. Good girl, don’t open the door. Mommy is coming back.” She put down her phone and cried.

The rest also tried to contact their family. Other than Cao Qianqian calling her parents, Zhao Tianming and Zhan Yun didn't manage to reach their families. Zhang Yun was very depressed, she squatted down and cried.

Luo Yuan looked at them, saddened. He then turned around and asked Huang Jiahui, “Is your daughter alright?”

Huang Jiahui shook her head and said, “The bugs are banging on the door now, and she is frightened. I need to go home now!”

“You want to kill yourself?” Luo Yuan asked. He then looked out through the window again and said, “Fine, I’ll go with you.”

He definitely wouldn't take the risk if he hadn't upgraded. After all, he wasn't a savior or superman. He could only help within the limits of his power and skills. If the mission was too dangerous and overwhelming, he couldn't and wouldn't try to finish it. However, he was more powerful now and three or four bugs could be considered manageable to him.

Huang Jiahui looked at Luo Yuan and said, "Xiao Luo, I really don't know what I can do in return for you. But I'm truly touched by you offering your hands, but I can't let you take the risk."

"There's no public transport now, or are you planning to walk home? Let's use my car," Luo Yuan said.

Huang Jiahui was so touched to the point where she couldn't speak a single word and just sobbed.

"Brother Luo, could you bring me along?" Cao Qianqian asked carefully while looking at Luo Yuan.

"You can tag along if your house is in the same direction as hers. Where do you stay?" Luo Yuan said with hesitation.

"Yuehu Garden, near Qingteng Road," Cao Qianqian replied nervously.

Yuehu Garden was actually quite near to Jingyue district where Luo Yuan used to stay, but it wasn't in the same direction and he

needed to drive another three to four kilometers. He sighed. Might as well bring her along then. "Alright, you can come with us then." Luo Yuan said.

"Thank you so much!" Cao Qianqian exclaimed, shedding tears of joy.

Zhao Tianming and Zhang Yun didn't say anything as they both thought it was safer to wait for rescue inside the building rather than taking the risk to escape.

"Both of you take care, we need to leave first," Luo Yuan said to the other two people.

"You too," Zhao Tianming said with slight sympathy but it was gone very soon. Zhang Yun tried to persuade Cao Qianqian but she insisted on leaving.

Luo Yuan smiled but didn't say anything. Everyone had to take full responsibility of their decisions, so did she. No one knew what was going to happen next .

The three of them left the building, passing through the first floor full of blood and broken limbs. Apparently, many hadn't managed to escape and Luo Yuan had to kill another four green bugs before walking out through the broken glass door.

There were a few bugs lying on the ground at the plaza square, but they didn't move even when they saw Luo Yuan and the two

women walking toward them. Obviously, they were too full after the feast and couldn't attack anymore. Luo Yuan looked at them and quickly walked to his car.

The windows were broken. Luo Yuan opened the door of his car and swept away the broken glass, then got into the driver's seat. He started the engine and drove toward the main entrance like a shot arrow once the two women got into the car.

A few bugs were shocked and flew up to the sky but then soon landed on the ground again.

Donghu city had become a horrible place where broken glass was all over the streets, reflecting the sun's light. The street was empty but for a few bugs still eating some dead bodies at the roadside. Blood was dripping down from their mouths while they chewed.

The trio could hear some screaming from afar, as well as gunfire. It didn't sound like a handgun, though, but the rifles from the army. That meant the army had already begun to attack the bugs. Luo Yuan's car disturbed many of the insects and they flew towards the car to attack them.

Unfortunately, most of them were killed by the car as well as Huang Jiahui's gun. The car engine sound also attracted the attention of some survivors nearby. They looked from behind the shattered windows, asking for help. Unfortunately, Luo Yuan could only protect himself and try to ignore them as he couldn't manage to save everyone. The car was driven away and the survivors hopelessly scolded and cursed them.

Huang Jiahui checked her handgun and her pocket. Stunned, she said, "Damn it. There are only two bullets left."

Luo Yuan was worried as he knew the journey wouldn't be smooth without her shooting skills. "Use it wisely then. Don't fire if it isn't necessary," he said.

"What if the bugs come over?" Huang Jiahui asked anxiously.

"Leave it to me then," Luo Yuan replied. Although it would be a bit inconvenient to get in and out of the car, but at least Huang Jiahui could help him during a critical time if necessary.

A few bullets flew from behind and penetrated the wall of a building, causing some cement to drop on Luo Yuan's car. He immediately stepped on the brake.

"Is it a soldier from the army force?" Huang Jiahui asked, looking back.

A soldier ran toward them with a rifle and said seriously, "Get out of the car!"

"Why? This is our car." Huang Jiahui asked, upset.

"This is a special military order, I hope you can compromise!" the soldier said coldly with a rifle in his hand.

Luo Yuan turned around and saw there were seven to eight soldiers more behind. A few of them were lying on the floor with a lot of blood on their bodies. Apparently, they needed a car to send these victims to the hospital. Luo Yuan would have agreed to lend them the car if they had asked nicely. However, he was mad now that the soldier used the attitude of a robber.

Luo Yuan opened the door and walked toward the soldier with his knife and said, "I never heard about the special military order and I don't want to hear it now. This is my car, so why would I give it to you?"

The soldier was stunned and mad at the same time as he had never seen anyone who dared to disobey a military order.

"What's happening?" a tan guy who was the Second Lieutenant Officer asked angrily after rushing over to see what was happenig. "How could you not know our buddies are in danger?" he scolded the soldier.

"I'm sorry, Sir. They didn't agree to give the car," the soldier explained.

"Why? We are fighting with the bugs to protect the citizens. Our soldiers are injured and we can't even use their car?" the officer said, turning around and staring at Luo Yuan.

"Your soldiers are not the only people who are injured. There are many people who get injured and even die every single second in

this city. Have you thought about our lives when you rob our car?"

The officer smiled evilly and said, "So that means you want to disobey my order right? You should know this is war time!"

"Are you threatening me? Do you know that you will be dead if you dare to touch your rifle?" Luo Yuan was mad and threatened the officer.

Luo Yuan wasn't an ordinary person who allowed other people to mistreat him, and he definitely wouldn't mind doing something crazy if he really got offended.

"Then you'll be shot by multiple bullets as well." The officer bit his teeth and raised his chin; he looked ugly. He didn't dare to simply move as he felt Luo Yuan was too calm. Usually, a normal citizen would have already lost their mind after seeing the soldiers, but for some reason he didn't see a similar reaction in Luo Yuan. He also thought that the only people who would still travel on the road with two women at this moment were either lunatics or a great men.

"Are you an evolution product?" the officer asked with hesitation.

Luo Yuan smiled but didn't answer his question. Both parties wanted something from each other but they were worried to screw up the deal. Luo Yuan then looked at the rifles and bullets, he suddenly said, "I have an idea, but I'm not sure you want to listen." He didn't wait for the permission from the officer and

continued, “Well, if you want the car, then trade it with the rifles and bullets.”

“You’re not part of the army, this is breaking the law!” the officer said with hesitation once more.

"Oh well, I think that kind of law belongs to the past, not now! A normal citizen could only wait to die if he didn't have any weapons. From what I see, your soldiers are going to die soon, but you're still wasting their time here. Come on! This is a fair deal, we need a way to protect ourselves if we don't have a car!" Luo Yuan said.

"Fine!" the officer finally agreed after a period of hesitation.

"Sir!" the soldier beside him shouted and stared at Luo Yuan.

"That's enough. Go get him a rifle and 300 bullets. This is an order!" the officer commanded.

"Yes, sir!" the soldier shouted out and ran toward the other soldiers in a mad dash

A moment later, the soldier returned. The officer took the rifle and a bag of bullets and then passed it to Luo Yuan. He then whispered, “I hope you use it properly.”

“Thanks for your reminder,” Luo Yuan said. He then smiled and continued to say, “By the way, I hope you don’t do something

which will cause misunderstanding.” He saw a green bug crawling over from the street and immediately shook and disappeared. Two soldiers were shocked and raised their rifles to look for Luo Yuan.

When they found him, the bug was already in two pieces. Luo Yuan shook the blade to clean off the greenish liquid. He then looked at the two soldiers who were aiming their rifles at him and walked toward them. “Just an easy job. I hope your rifle is safe to use,” he said.

Luo Yuan walked to the car and asked Huang Jiahui and Cao Qianqian to leave the car with their belongings. He then left the scene together with them.

“F*ck! He is too much!” Both of the soldiers put down their rifles and spat when they saw Luo Yuan disappeared from their vision.

“Sir, are we really going to let them go?” the soldier asked angrily.

“What would we do if we arrested him? Hurry up, and send everyone to the military hospital. Hopefully, we can still save some of them.”

Chapter 31: Guard Rank

“I thought he was going to fire!” Huang Jiahui uttered, still shaken.

“They’re not that foolish. We’re not holding a grudge, so they wouldn’t take that risk,” Luo Yuan expressed his thoughts calmly. To be honest, he was rather shaken by what had happened. He didn’t know what to think, but he was infuriated by the idea of falling back.

Lucky for them, the opponent had not dared open fire. They might have just lost their car but they had managed to acquire a rifle.

In fact, Luo Yuan considered himself quite fortunate; cars were not worth much these days, the petrol in the vehicle held more value than the car itself. If he ever decided to trade off the rifle though, he could potentially exchange several hundred liters of petrol, or even dozens of cars for it.

“Do you know how to use a rifle?” Luo Yuan asked Huang Jiahui.

“I’ve never handled one before, so my aim may be off.”

“Well, that’s still a better aim than mine!” Luo Yuan joked as he handed over the rifle.

She struggled under the weight of it, her arms sinking as she

tried to hold it up. She shook her head. “This won’t do, it’s too heavy. Unless I can use it lying on the ground. I’m more accustomed to pistols. Too bad rifle bullets are not compatible with them.”

Luo Yuan had no experience with anything military-related. He sighed, “If I knew the bullets were different, I would have asked for pistol ammo instead. I thought all guns use the same bullets!”

“Don’t beat yourself over it. I doubt they have any pistol ammo left anyway. Besides, only battalion officers have access to that kind of supply in the army.”

“Agh! Bugger it. How far are we from that place you mentioned?”

“Hmm... I can’t be sure, but I think we might still need to walk a few stations.”

Suddenly, a group of civilians flocked out of a building in mass hysteria, screaming and running from the seven green beetles pursuing them from behind.

The leading beetle was only a few steps away from the slowest lady running at the back of the crowd. It stretched forward and bit right into her skull, sucking the grey matter and splattering blood all over while its prey twitched vigorously in a mad dance.

The crowd ran, but not a lot of them were able to get away. They were stomped, crushed, some even chewed to death, painting the

ground red with their blood. The screams and scent of fresh blood attracted even more beetles that were in the area. One of them was as big as a car. It was a darker green than the others, and run so fast that it looked like a blur to the naked eye.

It was very clear that in the realm of green beetles hierarchy was very specific. The surrounding beetles momentarily cleared out and made way for the giant beetle among them.

The crowd saw where Luo Yuan and co. were and started running towards them. Luo Yuan's face was lost its colour. "Oh, fuck." He had never expected that there would be a bigger presence among the green beetles. Just by looking at its size, he could imagine the pressure of its body on him. Even Zhao Qianqian could see how freaked out the usually calm Luo Yuan was. It sent shivers down her spine and made her knees weak.

"Initiate E-grade Mission: Annihilate Guard Rank Green Beetles. Accept / Decline?"

The message buzzed into his mind, not helping his state of panic. "GUARD RANK beetles? F*CK!" he exclaimed. Ever since he had last levelled up, he had kept low-ranking pests (in this case, the beetles) out of his mind, but now the giant beetle had stripped him off his short lived glory. He wanted to decline the mission and run away from this monstrosity as fast as he could. He was not confident that he would be able to kill one guard rank beetle, let alone a whole army of them. Luo Yuan glanced at the rifle Huang Jiahui was holding, suppressed his fear, and made up his mind. "I accept the mission."

“Give me the rifle.”

Huang Jiahui was startled, but she handed the rifle over without hesitation. He took the rifle, removed the magazine to check the ammo, locked it back into place, and took aim right at the giant beetle. The crowd ran amok at the sight of Luo Yuan holding up the rifle. They thought that it was aimed at them. Luo Yuan aimed directly at the guard beetle, taking deep breaths, his finger carefully pushing on the trigger.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Bullet shells rained all around him as he fired at the guard beetle. He kept adjusting his position while he fired, closing in on his target until.... BANG! He managed to get its body on his fourth try. Luo Yuan was taken aback by how unfazed the guard beetle seemed by the shot; that was when he realized how tough its exoskeleton was... The bullet had only scratched the surface of its body. Once the smoke had cleared away, he finally saw clearly that he had not made just one, but several scratches on its exoskeleton. His previous shots had actually hit the target!

The guard beetle raged and screeched, reacting violently to his shots. It rampaged through the common beetles, pushing them out of its way, and ran with all its fury towards the source of the gunshots... charging right at Luo Yuan.

Luo Yuan tossed the rifle aside and reached for his sword while he held his position. It wasn't very difficult to suppress his urge to escape. He knew that no matter how fast he ran, he would never be able to outrun the raging guard beetle. Never in his life had he ever

walked on such thin ice, and it ignited a flaming survival instinct within him.

It's too late to chicken out now. Guess one of us has to die. Bring it on, you ugly green piece of sh*t!

Luo Yuan remained focused, fuelled by an unknown fit of determination. Everything around him slowed into temporal suspension. His vision cleared to the point where he could see nothing but himself and the charging guard beetle. He felt a gust rushing right at him, and he dug his heels into the ground and sprinted head-on towards his opponent. Their momentums gradually closed up the distance to an inevitable point of collision.

When Luo Yuan was nearly eye-to-eye with the guard beetle, he turned slightly, sprung almost three feet in the air, and landed smoothly on the back of his opponent, his sword piercing through its exoskeleton.

Luo Yuan pushed with all his strength, but an inch was the furthest his sword would go into the body of the guard beetle. He still considered it a successful execution of his plan. As a trained martial artist with high sword mastery, Luo Yuan was able to adapt to most battle situations. He carefully jumped from the back of the beetle and wrenched the sword from its back. He proceeded to lower his centre of gravity while he hang onto the back of the guard beetle and positioned his upper body on the same ground level. Then he bent his knees and took small steps while he stretched his toes on the smooth surface of the beetle's exoskeleton. It only took him a few steps to reach the beetle's head. Then all he had to do was wait for the perfect opportunity to

cut it off. However, the guard beetle had exceptional senses, and was already aware of its unwanted passenger, which made it stop right in its tracks.

Basic physics and gravity did not allow Luo Yuan to hold his position on the back of the guard beetle. Instead, he was thrown head first into the ground. However, thanks to his quick reflexes, Luo Yuan was able to grab hold of the beetle's horns, which were about one or two metres long. His body swung all over and he could feel his heart thumping in his chest. The beetle guard stared right at him with its obelisk eyes and opened its intricate mouth structure to exhale an awful stench. Luo Yuan could not catch his breath. He realized that his vision was starting to blur and that he was breaking into cold sweat. He held onto the beetle's horns tightly and forced himself to swing his way back onto its head.

Luo Yuan was flipping mid-air when he suddenly heard a loud breaking sound. He could not see clearly what was happening, but he caught a glimpse of the beetle's limbs breaking and retracting in a lightning-quick motion. Dust particles were scattered all around him until he realized, almost too late, that the beetle was digging into the ground. In a short span of time, it had managed to dig a hole about a metre wide and half a metre deep.

When Luo Yuan landed on the beetle's head, he felt a burning sensation on his feet. However, he couldn't afford to be distracted by the pain. He remained focused and lifted the sword high before he forced it down on the beetle's skull. Unfortunately, it was a common truth among the animal kingdom that the head is the most vital part of the body, so it came as no surprise that the beetle's skull had a hard, slippery structure. The tip of the sword failed to achieve what Luo Yuan had intended it to and kept

slipping off when it came into contact with the beetle.

Agitated by the unwanted passenger, the guard beetle shook in a vigorous motion. Luo Yuan laid himself flat on the beetle's back, trying to stay as still as possible by holding onto the spikes on the beetle's shoulders. When he had steadied himself, he went back to hacking at the beetle's head with his sword, leaving only light white scratches on the deep green surface. The sword was only light blue; it would take something with a much higher rating to cause some serious damage on a monster as tough as the guard beetle. The two were equally frustrated by their opponent and this seemingly endless dance; the guard beetle spread its wings in alarm, getting ready to take off. Luo Yuan was caught unawares and put into a sudden state of despair by what was happening. Cold sweat dripped down his head. He knew that if the beetle took flight, his only option would be to get off its back. When he noticed that the wing structure below the beetle's exoskeleton was significantly softer though, an idea occurred to him.

“THAT’S IT!”

He lowered his stance and leapt to the back of the guard beetle, which was already starting to fly off. Luo Yuan almost slipped due to the current caused by the beetle's flight, but he held on, lowered his centre of gravity, and struggled to make his way back to its wings. Gripping the hilt of the sword with his sweaty hands, he carefully positioned his weapon near the hidden flesh under the beetle's wings. Without any hesitation, he grabbed and cut the beetle's right wing right from the root.

CRACK!

The guard beetle instantly lost its balance and its ability to fly. Its body tilted to one side and it quickly fell towards the ground. BOOM! It crashed from a distance of 20 feet above the ground. Luo Yuan was flung off in the process, rolling across the ground and only stopping when he hit a wall. His vision was blurred and there was not a single part of his body that was not aching. The battle, however, was far from over.

He saw the beetle wobbling, trying to stand up again after its fall; he tasted metal in his throat and spat out the blood, standing up from the dusty ground all around him. He started to walk slowly towards the beetle, gradually going faster before breaking into a run. Then he furiously jumped onto its back, thrust his sword into its broken wing, and dragged it from the bottom up with an awful flesh-tearing sound. The wound expanded, the beetle's gooey blood and guts spilling from within and splashing around like an exploding soda can. The beetle screeched in agony. It was in a state of painful trance, flipping and turning as if it could shake the pain off. Then it stretched its uninjured wing and started to flap it in motion, creating a blast of wind.

Luo Yuan held his ground against the wind and continued to drag his weapon all the way to the beetle's head. He suddenly thought of alchemy, and as he did, the blade started to glow red and radiate heat. He wasn't sure if it was the contact between the sword and the exoskeleton, or the sword being sharpened by the alchemy, but the weapon managed to tear open a separate wound in the guard beetle. He was excited at the success of his strategy, so he kept using alchemy. The sword seemed to get sharper and sharper as it effortlessly sliced and diced through the beetle's exoskeleton, even when the alchemy's effect was over.

The guard beetle struggled less and less, until it finally collapsed. Luo Yuan removed the sword from the beetle, and was about to deliver the death blow, when he noticed something peculiar. The color of the blade had changed from white-silver to a glistening jade-green; he checked to see if it was the temporary coat of the beetle's fluid. He attempted to wipe the color off, but there was no liquid. The blade was dry.

“Could it be a side-effect of the alchemy I used?”

He couldn't think of any logical reason, and there seemed to be no other kinds of reasons. He held the sword with one hand and effortlessly plunged it into the beetle's skull. Its body trembled and it seemed to want to stand up for a moment, but it eventually fell back to the ground.

Several system messages buzzed into Luo Yuan's mind.

“E-Level Mission: Annihilate Guard Rank Green Beetles. Mission Accomplished. Time: 8 minutes. Mission Score: S”

“Experience Earned: 1,600”

“Bonus S Score Experience: 1,600”

Luo Yuan was very surprised that he had achieved an S score on

this mission. It seemed to him that it had all come down to luck as it was the most challenging mission he'd ever taken on. If he hadn't misjudged it, he would have not accepted an E-Level Mission at all – it had been completely out of his league. But he was glad that he had managed to complete it and had gained the extra experience. He was on the EXP range of 4,100 – 4,800 now. That was about 700 EXP before his next level up, which he would achieve if he scored a perfect F+ Level Mission or completed a tougher E-Level one.

It then occurred to him that the more dangerous a zone, the higher the chances of triggering a mission would be. Hopefully, it would happen as often as it did during the good old days – when he used to trigger a mission once every two or three months. At times it could be as bad as one mission every six months. But since the unprecedented changes in the environment, the frequency of the missions had been increasing exponentially. Luo Yuan had already completed two within the same day, which used to be unheard of.

He collected his thoughts and jumped off the body of the slayed guard beetle, almost tripping on his landing. He spat the blood that was still in his mouth and started to become aware of the pain all over his body. His legs felt particularly bad. He looked down and realized that half his pants had been shredded from his thighs down, and that the skin on his calves had been completely obliterated, exposing the red threads of his muscles.

“So that's why it hurts so much.”

He could recall how it had happened. When the beetle had shot its limbs out, his calves had been torn by the intensity of the

particles breaking from its digging motion.

Soon, Huang Jiahui and Zhao Qianqian were running towards him, an extra group of men and women following closely behind them.

Chapter 32: Blue Rank

Huang Jiahui and Zhao Qianqian were running towards Luo Yuan, an extra group of men and women following closely behind them.

It should be noted that Huang Jiahui had not been standing idly during Luo Yuan's battle with the beetle. She had actually been quite occupied. It had all started when two regular beetles got slaughtered while attempting to attack her. That was when she ran out of ammo, and picked up the rifle Luo Yuan had tossed aside earlier to continue fighting.

The crowd had thinned as most people had fallen prey to the green beetles, who eventually stopped their assault once they had had their fill, giving the remaining escapees a chance at survival.

"Xiao Luo, are you alright?" Huang Jiahui asked as she looked at his injuries with worry.

"I'm okay, I guess," he said, relieved that the two of them were not in harm's way anymore. He looked at the five people behind her and asked, "What about them?"

"They'd like to follow us."

"Follow us? Follow us where? There was a military camp along the path we came from. It's safer for them to go there."

“You little brat! How can you be so unsympathetic?” exclaimed a middle-aged woman, who seemed infuriated by his rejection.

“Yeah, shouldn’t we all stick together during difficult times like these?” added one of the men.

“Sympathy would have cost me my life. Besides, none of you would have survived if you had been sympathetic to your fellow escapees. I’m sorry, but we can’t help you. It’s best that we go our separate ways,” Luo Yuan replied calmly. He was aware that having these people in his party would only slow him down. It would also attract unwanted green beetle attention. Plus, most of them had been severely injured and were uncertain of how much longer they would actually be able to survive.

He turned to Huang Jiahui and Zhao Qianqian, “Let’s go. We’re wasting daylight.”

He tried to take a step, but was suddenly forced to stop by a sharp pain in his calves. He almost fell over. An unsuspecting man took advantage of his weakened state and stealthily moved towards Huang Jiahui. He pulled a dagger from his waist and pointed it at her.

“Don’t move. Sure, we can go our separate ways. As long as you give us the rifle,” he demanded.

Zhao Qianqian was shocked by what was happening. “What the hell do you think you’re doing?”

“Shut your mouth, b*tch! Don’t make me repeat myself. Give us the rifle, or your friend dies.”

No doubt this man had been eyeing the rifle right from start. During such difficult times, a rifle would increase his chances of survival, give him less reasons to be afraid, and even potentially allow him to do whatever he wanted. He hadn’t made his move earlier because he had been terrified of Luo Yuan, the mighty warrior fighting against the giant guard beetle; but now, with Luo Yuan injured, he had seen a window of an opportunity and had grabbed it.

Huang Jiahui was not afraid. She was just angry that the people they had just saved had turned against them.

“That’s right, you piece of sh*t. While you’re at it, throw in your sword or your girlfriend will pay!” the middle-aged woman threatened confidently, seeing that the tide had turned in their favor.

The rest of them stayed quiet, looking anxiously at the situation that was unravelling.

“I’m confused. Didn’t you just save them?” Luo Yuan asked Huang Jiahui. Even though he hadn’t seen it with his own eyes, it seemed quite obvious considering she had been the one holding the rifle while they followed her from behind.

Huang Jiahui rolled her eyes at his remark, still raging at the idea that they had stumbled upon such ungrateful people.

“Just cut the bullsh*t and give me the rifle. Or would you prefer that I stab this pretty lady instead?” the man threatened loudly while he looked at Luo Yuan. It was clear that the stranger with the knife was the one in control of the situation. Luo Yuan touched the hilt of his sword before he started laughing.

“Give him the rifle, Lady Huang.”

Huang Jiahui was taken aback. She reluctantly handed the gun over to her captor, who kept the dagger against her waist while he accepted the rifle with his free hand.

“And the ammo. If you would be so kind as to put it on the ground,” the man demanded, licking his lips habitually.

She had no choice but to obey and put the pack of ammo on the ground. Her captor signaled for another middle-aged man to pick it up. The man hesitated at first before he carefully picked up the ammo while he eyed Luo Yuan in fear.

“You got what you wanted. Can we go now?” Luo Yuan asked patiently.

The captor laughed hysterically, his face somewhat twisted. He picked up the rifle and aimed it at Luo Yuan while he took a few steps back.

“Go? It’s too late for you to go anywhere now, buddy. I can’t

sleep peacefully if I let an enemy like you just walk away! You've got your soft spot to blame. She's just a girl. It's all about power now. Besides, why would you worry about one girl when a rifle could have gotten you so much more? You've got yourself some really good squeeze here, you know that? Must have been really nice to tap an ass like that. But don't you worry one bit, my friend. I'll take good care of her when you're dead."

Zhao Qianqian looked horrified, but Huang Jiahui seemed unfazed by the threats.

Luo Yuan found the situation both funny and infuriating. He looked at their captor like was a dead man.

"You really think you can take me on? Guess I'll just have to remind you that your rifle's safety is still locked!"

The captor looked at the rifle in his hand and turned pale.

In the blink of an eye, Luo Yuan shifted, tearing the healing wounds on his calves and spilling fresh blood as he moved.

He turned.

He dashed.

WHOOSH!

He sheathed his sword back into place.

The sound of fluid squirting and bubbling, and the thud of a rifle falling were heard. Then there was the sound of a man choking, gasping, and drowning in his own blood.

The captor's bulging eyes were filled with horror. He attempted to cover the cut on his neck with his hands, but blood kept bursting uncontrollably between his fingers. He took one last look at his killer, looking pained and remorseful.

The other civilians shuffled backwards. A woman with thick makeup fell to the ground, sickened by the gore.

Luo Yuan looked at the man who had picked up the ammo. The man stuttered and struggled to speak, "Pppplease... Dddon't... dddon't kill me! It wasn't mmme! I don't kkkknow this man!"

"Give. Me. The. Ammo."

The man crawled hurriedly towards the ammo pack, and handed it over apologetically to Luo Yuan. He got on his knees and lowered his head to the ground. Luo Yuan turned and glanced at the woman, who had crawled several paces away. She was still shaking, but she managed an awkward smile.

Luo Yuan took a deep breath, "I still stick to my word. It's best if we all go our separate ways."

“Yes! Yes of course!”

“LEAVE! NOW!”

No one dared utter another word. They ran as fast as they had from the beetles. The woman struggled to stand, thanking Luo Yuan once again before she ran off.

When the scene was clear and the commotion was finally over, Luo Yuan could not stand still any longer. He violently spouted dark blood, turning very pale. Huang Jiahui ran to support him.

“Xiao Luo, are you alright? It’s all my fault. If I’d known the type of people they were, I would have let them become beetle food! How could I be so stupid?” she started tearing up.

“I’m fine, really. Could you pass me the luggage?”

He had already suffered an extensive injury during the battle and another one later when he had fallen. That sudden move had only made his condition worse. He was only standing by sheer willpower anymore.

Zhao Qianqian broke out of her stupor and rushed to drag the luggage over.

“Open it and take out the fried meat strips.”

She did as she was told, and turned the luggage upside down to find a pack of fried meat strips sealed in a yellow paper bag. She held the bag, but wasn't sure what to do with it.

“Are you hungry?”

Luo Yuan ignored her and snatched the paper bag. He tried to tear it open, but he was too tired. Huang Jiahui rushed to help him by untying the knots sealing the paper bag. The sweet scent of meat whiffed out. The girls couldn't help but drool.

Luo Yuan frantically stuffed several strips inside his mouth and started munching them down, swallowing the meat. He ate so quickly that almost half the pack had vanished in a heartbeat. His body was heating up from the food, and he was starting to feel stronger. Flesh from light blue animals contained a concentrated amount of nutrition, even more so than the nutrition a well-aged ginseng could provide. It was very effective at healing injuries.

Huang Jiahui felt his body temperature rise when she put her hand on his forehead. “Zhao Qianqian, get a bottle of water! Quickly!”

Zhao Qianqian nodded and took out a bottle of water from the luggage.

Luo Yuan grabbed the bottle, took a couple of sips and shoved Huang Jiahui aside. “I'm feeling much better now.”

“But you might be coming down with a fever,” she said, sounding worried.

Luo Yuan laughed.

“These are fried meat strips made from high-level monsters. Consuming them is bound to make anyone’s body temperature rise. You try one! Just a little, though. Your body might react differently. You might even get a nosebleed.”

That kind of meat was considered very valuable among commoners. Not to Luo Yuan, though. There was still an abundance of it in the storage area of his house.

Huang Jiahui looked at him skeptically, noticing how much he already seemed to be recovering. She looked inside the paper bag. “No wonder they smell so heavenly!”

Zhao Qianqian had already started feasting on the fried meat strips before Huang Jiahui had even realized it. She handed the paper bag over to Huang Jiahui. Minutes later, the two of them started feeling a warm sensation all over their bodies while their complexion glowed with an unexpected blush.

They couldn’t resist the taste of the monster meat. As they kept feasting on the fried meat strips, they watched Luo Yuan walk towards the carcass of the guard beetle.

Chapter 33: Gas

Luo Yuan inspected the carcass of the guard beetle and confirmed that it was indeed a blue rank monster. Oddly though, its nutrition appeared to be on the same level as the one found in light blue monsters. Weak. He took a while to consider whether he should harvest the green beetle’s flesh, but he decided that it wasn’t worth the hassle. Truthfully, it wasn’t only its weak nutrition that he based this decision upon; he had lost his appetite just by looking at how awfully green all that mess was. Still, he noted what a waste it would be to leave a blue rank monster behind.

He found a spear-like exoskeleton and was tempted to build a new armor using alchemy. However, that thought made him remember what had become of his sword. Uncertain of what might have happened to its properties, he decided to cast an evaluation spell.

“Razor-sharp Sword”

“Properties: M-Alloy, Green Beetle Exoskeleton”

”Rarity: Blue”

”Weight: 4.3 kg”

“Strength: 20-24”

“Secondary Effects: Attack Speed +1”

“Minimum Requirements: STR 11”

“Evaluation: The perfect combination of high-level alloy and green beetle exoskeleton. It enhances the sharpness of the blade.”

What had been originally just a plain sword had now become a sharpened sword with an improved strength of 4 points and a blue rarity level. Luo Yuan couldn't help but feel joy at this accidental product of alchemy. He wanted to find out if it could get any stronger, so he plunged the blade into the hind leg of the carcass and began chanting. The blade instantly burned, lightening the dark green flesh gradually until it eventually turned into a dry piece of meat. He gently touched the flesh with his foot and - poof! - it turned into dust. He could see the blade glowing a brighter green than it originally had, somehow looking translucent. He gently waved the sword around, hearing the blade tear through the air particles, feeling how refined his weapon had become. He cast a second evaluation spell and found that, other than a slight increase in strength, its rarity had not changed.

Luo Yuan was excited at how the alchemy had improved his weapon; he continued casting spells on his sword while he moved from limb to limb on the guard beetle's carcass. The more spells he cast though, the slower the merging process became and the lesser the increase in strength his weapon obtained. By the time all its limbs had been merged, his weapon only had a total strength increase of two points, and its rarity had not changed at all.

I guess the sword cannot achieve a rarity beyond the monster's ranking.

He thought of his snake-skin bulletproof vest, and he immediately took it off and placed it on the back of the beetle's exoskeleton. He started casting spells once again, and only stopped when the exoskeleton had become white as snow.

“Fortified Snake Skin Bulletproof Vest”

“Material: Snake Scales, Snake Skin, Green Beetle Exoskeleton”

“Rarity: Blue”

“Weight: 0.3 kg”

“Defense: 20-24”

“Minimum Requirements: N/A”

“Evaluation: A bulletproof vest fortified with snake scales and green beetle exoskeleton. It can protect the wearer against most blades and bullets.”

It would seem that the merging had also cancelled the former negative coercion effect that used to be on the vest; Luo Yuan had not remarked upon this change as the former effect had not had much of an impact. He held the vest, feeling the hardened texture that made it hard to bend on the edges. He put it on and felt slightly contorted from the tightness, feeling more or less like a walking tin can.

Desperate times call for desperate measures, I guess.

He lit a cigarette from a pack he was carrying and took a deep puff. He had never been much of a smoker, but the dire times he was going through had definitely changed him and stressed him out enough to constantly crave a smoke. He tossed his half-smoked cigarette aside, put on a wrecked jacket, and walked back towards the girls.

He stumbled a bit on the way, still recovering from the exhausting battle. He noticed that the girls were staring blankly at the sky. Blood was flowing non-stop from their noses, turning their faces into abstract pieces of art covered in bright red stains. He took the paper bag from them and saw that it was completely empty. They denied finishing the whole lot, claiming that it had already been less than half when they had taken it from him. However, he was sure there had been at least half left and was shocked by how quickly the meat strips had been consumed.

“I can’t even... I told you this would happen if you ate too much!”

“But we’re fiiine... Right?” Huang Jiahui blushed. She wasn’t sure if that was a side-effect of the meat strips or her own

embarrassment being manifested.

“You won’t die per se, but these things...They are technically an aphrodisiac! They excite your body when you consume them! You know what, forget it. You girls survive bleeding a week every month without dying anyway.”

“You did not say that!” Huang Jiahui exclaimed, baffled by Luo Yuan’s remark.

Huang Jiahui thought about her own daughters back home, who couldn’t even handle a nosebleed by themselves, and was snapped back into the present. She felt anxious to continue their journey now that their hero had recovered.

They resumed walking, getting ambushed several times along the way. Most attackers were shot dead by Huang Jiahui with the rifle. After less than an hour of walking, they arrived at the Shanshui District. Huang Jihui was very fidgety and kept mumbling to herself constantly.

The Shanshui District was a high-rise zone, where every unit was at least ten floors high. Huang Jihui lived on the seventh floor. Unfortunately for the trio, the power supply had been cut, so the elevator was out of commission. They had to climb their way up the stairs and by the time they reached the seventh floor, Huang Jiahui was completely out of breath and looking white as a sheet.

Luo Yuan looked ahead of her and saw that the metal gate was ajar. There were several dents on it made by both big and small

punches, one of which was aimed right at where the lock had been, causing the door to break open. He deduced that the punches were made by a green beetle's front limbs.

Huang Jiahui got herself together and frantically dashed towards her home.

“Ningning? NINGNING! Where are you?”

Luo Yuan and Zhao Qianqian quickly ran after her. The room was a complete mess. Everything had been tossed all over the place as if a hurricane had swept inside. The living room glowed from the reflection of the green beetle carcasses, and the walls were marked by bullet holes. Luo Yuan examined an empty bullet shell he found on the floor.

“Someone was here. You should look for your daughter. I think she's still alive considering there's no blood in the room.”

Huang Jiahui sighed in relief, but was unable to find her daughter anywhere in the house. She ran towards the phone in a panic. Something had just occurred to her, and she dialed before she could even hear a dial tone. “Yujiahui, is Ningning with you?”

“Yeah, she's safe. Lucky I got there in time before anything happened.”

She exhaled, “I can't thank you enough! I was worried sick!”

“She is my daughter too. It’s been getting really dangerous recently. I think it’d be best if she stayed with me for a little longer.”

“Oh, okay. That’s fine. Sounds reasonable. Could you please put her on? I just want to hear her voice.”

“I’m out on a mission at the moment. How about tonight? You could move here too. I’ve already spoken with Xiao Yan. You guys would get along just fine.”

“Ugh! How could you even suggest that? I can’t believe it!”

“Jiahui, please. Listen to me. It’s really f*cked up out there right now, alright? People are dying every minute! It’s too dangerous for you to be living on your own. If you move here, I could protect you. I mean it, I...”

She abruptly slammed the receiver and tossed the phone on the couch.

“Was that your ex-husband?” Zhao Qianqian asked.

“Something like that. We’ve been too caught up with work to get an official divorce yet. But we’ve been separated for more than two years. Forget about that assh*le. Look at this mess! You guys want anything to drink? There should be some tea left, I’ll go put the kettle on,” she said, trying her best to remain calm. She walked into the kitchen, where they heard her shout, “The gas has stopped

working!”

“What? The gas?” Luo Yuan echoed in concern.

The units in the Donghu District ran on an interconnected system of gas piping. Only a handful of households use a canned gas supply. Luo Yuan was not as concerned about the power outage, because it was not as much of a necessity compared to the gas supply. Civilization could still function without power, but it would be slightly inconvenient to live without gas. People would have to go back to the stone age and start their own fires to cook their meals.

This hit him hard. It was probably the first time that he felt that the end was near.

From the broken window, he could see several green beetles casually taking a stroll, undisturbed by any human presence. It was as if the world had been dominated by aliens.

Luo Yuan took out a cigarette and struggled to light it. He was shaking. He took a puff and nervously beat its ashes to the ground.

Zhao Qianqian was confused, “The government would handle it, right? They wouldn’t let us die of starvation, would they? Otherwise, what are we going to eat?”

“Let’s hope they will,” Luo Yuan said as he stood. “I have to go now.”

From the outside, Luo Yuan might seem to have recovered from all his injuries, but he was aware that it was only the effect of the meat strips that was keeping him from collapsing. Once that effect wore off, he wasn't sure what would become of him.

Zhao Qianqian got up nervously.

Huang Jiahui hesitated, caught in a dilemma. She looked at the broken door and recalled how angry she had been on the phone. "Xiao Luo, is it alright if I stay at your place for now?"

"Of course it is. I've got plenty of rooms to spare!"

At times like these, it was indeed a terrifying thought for a woman to be alone; especially when her house lacked a proper door.

Zhao Qianqian stood silently, completely baffled.

Huang Jiahui quickly packed some essentials. She was out the door with her luggage in less than ten minutes time.

Chapter 34: Accidental Injury

After seeing Cao Qianqian off, Luo Yuan and Huang Jiahui arrived at Luo Yuan's building in the Jingyue District.

"Which floor are staying on?" Huang Jiahui tried to find something to talk about. She was feeling quite nervous. This was the first time that she would be staying at an acquaintance's house for a few days.

"Fourth," he said, turning around to look at her.

"Are you staying with her now?" Huang Jiahui asked while she played with her fringe.

"Who? Are you talking about Zhao Yali? She is back in her hometown." Luo Yuan seemed to idle for a bit at the mention of Zhao Yali. He quickly changed the topic, "All the furniture is still here. You can stay in her room. Please hide the rifle so we can avoid any unnecessary trouble," Luo Yuan told Huang Jiahui when he saw that she was still holding it.

Donghu City was a mess and no police would bother to arrest them even they knew they had a rifle. However, it would be best for them to be more careful if they wanted to stay there.

"Okay," Huang Jiahui responded before she put the rifle into her luggage.

The two of them arrived on the fourth floor very soon. Luo Yuan could sense that there was someone standing near the fire escape. When he opened the door, he found Wang Shishi standing there and sobbing.

"Uncle, my parents aren't home. I'm scared," she said while she looked at Luo Yuan with a pair of big teary eyes.

Luo Yuan felt bad and said, "Why don't you come stay at my house for a while?"

"Thank you, Uncle!" Wang Shishi responded.

Huang Jiahui felt sorry for her and asked, "You're such a pretty girl. How old are you?"

"I'm in Year 8. Are you his girlfriend?" Wang Shishi asked curiously.

Huang Jiahui felt embarrassed, and she immediately regretted talking to her. "No, we're just friends. I'll only be staying here for a few days," she replied.

Luo Yuan did not bother listening to their conversation. He just inserted the key into the lock and opened the door. The house was a mess. All the glass had been broken, including the balcony door. Luo Yuan checked around the house to make sure that no one had entered it before he walked into the kitchen. He switched on the gas stove and watched the blue flame get weaker and weaker until

it finally disappeared. He cursed silently. Something was wrong.

"Xiao Luo, I'm going to take a shower first," Huang Jiahui shouted from the other room.

Luo Yuan rushed to stop her, "Wait!" he said while he lingered around the room.

"What's wrong?" Huang Jiahui asked, noticing Luo Yuan's panic. She was cold, sweaty and scared, and she was feeling really uncomfortable.

"Do you think there will be a water supply if there is no gas supply? The water storage in the city center must have been attacked. Soon there will be no water if nobody fixes it," Luo Yuan said calmly as he thought about it. He did not wait for Huang Jiahui to respond. He went straight to the bathroom and switched on the tap.

Luo Yuan was relieved to see water gush out. "Can you help me bring the plastic pail and the pot over from the balcony?" he asked.

"Okay," Huang Jiahui said, running towards the balcony. There were lots of pots in the house. Other than Luo Yuan's pail and pot, Zhao Yali had also left a couple of them behind. There were two plastic pails and four pots in total. Nobody cared which ones had been used to wash the face and which ones the legs.

Luo Yuan filled all the containers with water and then told

Huang Jihui, "You can take a shower now. Enjoy your shower while there is still water. We might not be able to have a shower anymore soon."

Huang Jiahui took a change of clothes and entered the bathroom.

"Uncle, do you think this is the end of the world?" Wang Shishi asked softly.

"Who told you that?" Luo Yuan asked her.

"I knew it," Wang Shishi said sadly.

"Would you be afraid if it was?" Luo Yuan asked again.

"Fear can't change anything. My parent are not coming back, right?" Wang Shishi asked again.

"Yes, they are. Perhaps something has just delayed their arrival." Luo Yuan patted her head to comfort her.

"You don't have to lie to me, Uncle. I saw a lot of people get eaten by those big bugs in the district. They even swallowed their bones." Wang Shishi was shaking while she talked about the beetles, but she kept looking directly at Luo Yuan.

Luo Yuan stopped patting her for a second. He did not know how to comfort her. Then he realized that she was already in Year 8 and

could even be considered a young adult. It was time for her to accept the harsh reality.

“You must be strong, okay? Even if your parents are not here, you must be strong to stay alive.”

“Yes.” Wang Shishi nodded while tears rolled down her cheeks.

“Alright then. Can you help me sweep all this broken glass?” Luo Yuan asked.

Wang Shishi took a deep breath and agreed. She used a broom and dustpan, wiping her tears away while she swept the broken glass. Luo Yuan watched her for a while, and then went into the storeroom. There was an axe, a hammer, scissors, nails, and other tools inside.

He walked back to the living room and cut the dining table into wooden boards, planning to use the edge pieces as firewood. He took a wooden board, the hammer and a few nails, and walked to the window to measure it. He began to nail the wooden board on the window. Although there was an iron grill outside, it was a fragile one that could easily be destroyed by a common thief, even more so by giant bugs. Of course, boarding the windows would not help much, but it was an extra layer of protection, and one that could block them from the bugs and other small animals' sight. A moment later, Huang Jiahui came out of the bathroom in casual wear. When she saw Luo Yuan and Wang Shishi working, she walked over to offer her help.

Luo Yuan stopped her, "We are good here. It's quite late already. Can you help prepare dinner? There is rice in the kitchen. Here's the lighter."

He raised his chin up and looked up at Huang Jiahui. She looked seductive. Her casual clothes did nothing to conceal her big breasts, and her small waist and round cherry-like butt drove Luo Yuan crazy. He quickly turned his gaze away and signaled for Wang Shishi to bring more wood.

Huang Jiahui took the lighter, but realized it was out of gas. She could only use firewood to cook, so she carried some into the kitchen. She took out a pressure cooker and found rice inside a cupboard. However, when the moment came that she needed to light up the fire, she paused. She didn't know how to. Although she'd had picnics before, it was usually her male colleagues who would take care of the fire starting part, so she had never learned.

Huang Jiahui asked, "Where should I start the fire? It can't be on the floor, right?"

"Find a pot and do it inside it," Luo Yuan replied.

Huang Jiahui said, "I can't do it, could you come and help?"

"Pour a little oil on the wood and then light it up," Luo Yuan told her. A moment later, a choking smell came from the kitchen. Luo Yuan did not bother checking on her as that kind of smell was normal when someone lit up a fire in the kitchen. However, the smoke started getting thicker and thicker, making both his and

Wang Shishi's eyes tear up at the same time that mucus started dripping down from their noses.

Luo Yuan felt that something was wrong and quickly rushed to the kitchen to check. He almost fainted when he saw the pressure cooker on top of the pot and Huang Jiahui holding its handle. She lifted the pressure cooker and blew some air into the pot. Her eyes were red and she looked completely lost.

"What are you doing? How are you going to light it up if there is not enough air in the pot?" Luo Yuan asked.

"How should I know? I've never started a fire before." Huang Jiahui looked innocent and sad. She had so much dirt on her face that she resembled a black cat.

"Then you should learn. You will be taking care of all our meals from now on," Luo Yuan said.

Huang Jiahui did not argue. She knew it was dangerous outside, and the only way to remain safe was to follow Luo Yuan. His strength was the main reason she wanted to stay with him. Luo Yuan walked to Zhao Yali's bedroom and broke the hangers in her closet, making two piles. He put one of them under the pot to stabilize it before balancing a few wires on the edge of the pot. He then lit up the wood and waited for it to burn. He put another pile on the pot and then placed the pressure cooker on top of it.

"Alright, it's done. Just leave the rest to me," Huang Jiahui said happily when she saw the fire burning.

“Okay,” Luo Yuan nodded.

He walked to the living room to continue his work. The wood from the dining table was not enough to board all the windows. He also had to chop up the tea table to cover the rest. The upgraded Zhanmadao was very sharp. Its extreme hardness could almost compete with modern technology. It was very easy for him to chop the wood. Wang Shishi was amazed and surprised as she looked at Luo Yuan chop up the tea table with a long green sword. He made it look as easy as cutting tofu.

The room became darker as he boarded up the windows. Other than the windows in the kitchen, only the screen door leading to the balcony was left. Luo Yuan scratched his head while he looked at it. He could not find such a big piece of wood. He looked around the house to see if there was anything that he could use to cover it. Finally, his eyes stopped on a door. He was wondering whether he could chop one of the bedroom doors or the door to the washroom, but one door did not seem enough to cover the whole screen door. After some consideration, he decided to put the issue on hold. He could handle it if four or five bugs came in. As the sun went down, Wang Shishi got even more depressed. She kept looking at the door, on the alert for any activity outside the house. She got up a few times, but sat back down again in disappointment.

Huang Jiahui moved a small table out from a bedroom and put all the dishes and rice on it. She had prepared 2 salted eggs, a plate of [zha cai](#), and a plate of canned stewed beef. Although that would not normally constitute a good meal, it was considered a gourmet meal under the circumstances.

Zha cai is a type of pickled mustard plant stem originating from Sichuan, China. The name may also be written in English as cha tsai, tsa tsai, jar choy, jar choy, ja choy, ja choy, or cha tsoi.

“Let’s eat.”

Luo Yuan began to eat right away. Wang Shishi looked lost in thought while she stared at the food. She did not even respond much when Huang Jiahui addressed her. Luo Yuan smoked after dinner. No one noticed the sweat on his forehead.

When he had finished his cigarette, he turned to Wang Shishi and said, “Shishi, you stay with Auntie Huang tonight, okay? Don’t think too much.”

"Thanks, Uncle." Wang Shishi put down the chopsticks and began sobbing.

Luo Yuan sighed but he did not try to comfort her. He got up from the chair and walked to his room. He lied down on the bed straight away. His face was distorted. The power of the rat meat had been fading and there was not much left in his body anymore. He used his own determination to control and distract himself sometimes, but every time he relaxed the pain took over. He tried his very best to endure it.

Thirty minutes later, there was a system message.

“Beep! Determination +1!”

While he listened to the message in his head, his mouth twitched a bit. Eventually his eyelids shut tightly and he fell asleep. He was awakened again by the sound of bombs.

“What’s happening?”

He grabbed his Zhanmadao and got up from the bed. Although his chest still hurt, he felt a lot better after having a good night’s of sleep. He walked to the window and opened the curtain. That was when he saw the wood and realized that he had boarded up all the windows.

He quickly opened the door and saw Huang Jiahui and Wang Shishi standing at the corner, looking towards the balcony. He got panicked and walked to the balcony to take a look outside. His entire body stiffened when he saw the green beetles flying in the sky. They looked frustrated as they lingered above the ground. He could hear the sound of bombs. Huang Jiahui and Wang Shishi looked relieved to see Luo Yuan.

“The army is here to save us!” Huang Jiahui said, sounding excited.

Luo Yuan was excited as well. The situation in Donghu City would get better if the army took over. Perhaps they could kill all the beetles. Neither the green beetles nor any other mutated animal could fight against their well-prepared modernized army. It would be a totally different kind of battle. Suddenly, a missile exploded into the sky near the district, producing a huge shock,

strong enough to kill all the beetles. Some of the beetles closest to the missile exploded even before they could reach the ground.

Luo Yuan felt the building shake. A hot wind came from the balcony as his brain suddenly went blank. People who had been born during peaceful times could never imagine what they were going through. Luo Yuan himself had only watched such scenes in television shows while he ate snacks and commented on the magic of the powerful weapons. He had never imagined the day when he would experience it for real.

A missile had just exploded not long ago when two more missiles exploded nearby, killing all the green beetles in the vicinity in mere seconds. After a few minutes, several armored trucks with 30mm bombs arrived. A bomb was released, flying up into the sky. The sounds made him feel uncomfortable. A few of the remaining beetles were killed, their greenish fluids spilling onto the ground. The cannon kept spinning and releasing bombs, almost hitting some of the nearby buildings in the process. Some of them did get hit, the bombs creating several holes and gaps in the walls.

Luo Yuan watched the scene speechless for a while. After he had recovered from the panic, he realized he was actually sweating. Their building happened to face the commercial street. Once the cannons aimed and released bombs in their direction, the building might collapse and they might all die.

"We can't stay here anymore! Let's go!" Luo Yuan urged them.

During modern wars, it was difficult for armies to avoid hurting innocent citizens accidentally, unless they were willing to sacrifice

their soldiers. Based on the situation in Donghu City, their main concern was not any accidental injuries, but the destruction of all green beetles as soon as possible. Although he understood that, Luo Yuan was still very mad. When something affected him, it was quite difficult for him to remain calm and make a rational decision.

Huang Jiahui sensed the danger as well. She quickly ran into the bedroom and came back with the rifle in her hand.

“Where should we go?” she asked

Luo Yuan walked towards the main door and said, “Head to the ground floor. At least it’s safer than here.”

“Alright!” Huang Jiahui replied.

Wang Shishi looked like a pale doll. She was just standing there, not moving a muscle. Luo Yuan looked at her and sighed, “Give me the rifle. You carry her.”

Huang Jiahui responded by handing him the rifle, lifting Wang Shishi up and walking towards the door.

Bullets penetrated the walls and produced high pitch sounds while they stepped carefully down the staircase. There were several cracks on the walls as well. Multiple layers of wall separated the outer walls of the building from the staircase, but the bullets could still penetrate them. Luo Yuan was shocked. His

heart beat very fast. He looked at Huang Jiahui, who looked pale and speechless. He was relieved to see that she was not hurt.

"Don't stop, keep running!" Luo Yuan shouted at her. She quickly followed Luo Yuan, both of them running down the stairs.

In one minute, the three of them had reached the ground floor. Apparently, Luo Yuan was not the only smart person in the building though, as the ground floor was packed with people. When they saw the rifle in Luo Yuan's hand, they all went silent. Nobody screamed, nobody tried to escape. They were not afraid, they were just alert. The ability to accept things was relatively higher during chaotic times than during peaceful times. Swords and knives had become common things, and it had also become very common for people to carry their weapons wherever they went.

Luo Yuan passed the rifle back to Huang Jiahui after she put down Wang Shishi. He believed Huang Jiahui was better at using it.

"Hurry up! Somebody please help her!"

Suddenly, a middle-aged man walked down the stairs with a woman in his arms. The woman was bleeding profusely. The crowd moved away to make space for them.

The middle-aged man seemed like a gentleman. He wore a pair of black-framed spectacles, and he looked anxious and helpless as he hugged the woman tightly in his arms. Blood was dripping down

his arm, forming a line.

He put the lady down on the empty space and begged the crowd, "Is anyone here a doctor? Could you please save her? Please..."

He was crying.

Luo Yuan took a look at the woman and quickly turned his gaze away. Her eyes were closed tight and her breathing seemed very weak. She looked as pale as a sheet, and there was a wound the size of a human fist on her chest. It was obvious she would not live much longer.

"Please help her! Please, I'm begging you... I can give you money. No, food. I still have food at home! I can give it all to you!" He looked at the crowd helplessly.

The people around him looked away. Someone said, "Even sending her to the hospital won't help now. Her injuries are too severe. You have my deepest condolences."

The man's body shook a little as he grieved. He wanted to touch her face, but his hand began to shake vigorously in the air. He cried out loud as he felt her body getting colder.

Chapter 35: Barrage

“Boom!”

Missiles exploded in the sky above several buildings across the district. There were whole clouds of dust, the explosion causing huge cracks to form on the ceiling of the ground floor. People tended to think nonsense when fear crept into their minds. The crowd looked like rats hiding in their holes cowardly. They kept shaking, feeling insecure and hopeless. The chaos also had some of the women and kids crying. No one could predict their future. Perhaps the next missile would drop right on their building and crush everyone inside it.

Wang Shishi was hiding in Luo Yuan's arms, shaking uncontrollably. Luo Yuan patted her head and sighed. He was also waiting for the call of destiny. He would much rather fight with weapons than wait in fear for an unknown future. At least if he died during a fight, he would know why he died. No one spoke, they just watched out from the grill with their eyes open wide. Perhaps that was the only thing they could do to calm themselves down.

Time flew. A few missiles exploded in the sky near their building, causing the crowd to scream. Donghu City was the second largest city in the Jiangnan Province. Even if it wasn't the number one city in priority for homeland security, it had to at least be the second one on the list. There were several bomb shelters around the city, but unfortunately they had failed to play any role during the battle. The bombing had been an emergency plan and most of the citizens had not been prepared for it. This battle was different than the one between humans and other mutated animals. The

beetles had the air advantage and they were attacking the city center, which had not allowed the government to send out a war warning. The battle was still going on at noon.

There were at least a hundred thousand beetles in Donghu City and it was not easy to kill all of them. There were countless missiles and grenades exploding in the sky, filling the air with a choking, burning smell. The sound of the explosions was fading as the evening sky turned darker. Everyone on the ground floor was extremely hungry, and their clothes were full of dust and pieces of cement that had dropped from the ceiling. They looked like construction workers coming home from a worksite. They waited for a while, then went back to their respective units after confirming that this was it for the day. Luo Yuan felt relieved, but his body was stiff and his face was covered in mortar. He looked like a freshly made statue.

There were about ten green beetles flying in the sky above, which was relatively less than what they had seen during the daytime. Luo Yuan would not be so worried if he did not realize that there were more big animals wandering in the sky than just the beetles. Other animals could fly at a very high speed too. Unfortunately, it was difficult to see clearly what kind of animals they were because the sky was too dark. Luo Yuan could guess what they were though, because he had killed one of them before.

There were a few more explosions farther away, but they too started to fade as the night went on. Luo Yuan did not know how many guard rank green beetles were lingering in the sky as he could only see a small part of the sky above him.

"Are those the same green beetles we saw earlier?" Huang Jiahui asked.

Luo Yuan sighed and nodded his head.

"Then the army...", Huang Jiahui drifted off.

Luo Yuan did not wait for her to finish her question before he said, "We will know in the next two days. You go and prepare dinner."

Huang Jiahui nodded and pulled Wang Shishi into the kitchen.

Luo Yuan was standing in front of the balcony, watching the guard rank green beetles. Even though he had killed a guard rank green beetle on the ground before, he had never imagined it could fly at such a high speed. If it flew just slightly faster, it would probably break the sound barrier. A regular weapon would have a hard time injuring this creature, which was very powerful in its attack. Luo Yuan was sure the army would experience a big loss from the current battle. Luo Yuan recalled that the system had identified the bugs as regular green beetles and guard rank green beetles. However, he did not know whether there was any higher level than that. What if...

Luo Yuan quickly stopped himself from thinking too much. He felt horrified when he allowed himself to entertain the possibility of the army getting defeated.

The next morning, Luo Yuan was awakened by the sound of a supersonic aircraft. He quickly got up from bed and put on his snakeskin bulletproof jacket. He could hear Huang Jiahui already shouting while he was about to open the door.

"Luo Yuan! Luo Yuan! Wake up! Hurry up! They're fighting again!"

Luo Yuan opened the door and saw Huang Jiahui and Wang Shishi standing in the hallway anxiously. They both looked exhausted and had dark circles under their eyes. Apparently, they had not slept well the previous night.

Luo Yuan walked to the balcony and saw a group of fighting jets that happened to be flying by the building. He guessed there were about a hundred fighting jets in the sky. Seconds later, an air-defense alarm was heard.

"Let's go to the ground floor," Luo Yuan said as he turned around.

He believed that the army was going to try and blast the green beetles. Huang Jia Hui nodded her head and lifted Wang Shishi into her arms.

"Wait, let me grab some food first." Luo Yuan could recall their experiences the previous day and thought today might be even worse. He went into the storeroom and took out some mantou that he had bought a while ago. He opened it and smelled it to confirm that it was safe to eat. Then he took the food and all of them walked quickly down to the ground floor.

There were currently only a few people gathered there. However, many residents ran down the staircase in less than a minute's time. Luo Yuan looked at the cracks on the walls and frowned. This building had been built to compensate the residents for the previous older building. That meant that the construction costs had been low and the quality had been relatively low as well. He was not sure that the building could survive a war, but his thought process was interrupted by the sound of bombs. Once the war had begun, the army was sure to try to do its best.

Everyone could see the scene playing out through the gaps of the grill. There were clouds of fire in the sky, and many bombs and bullets being delivered on the battlefield. They saw shockwaves hit several tall buildings and leave holes on their walls. One minute later, the building began to shake vigorously as the barrage got closer, and a missile exploded nearby. Suddenly, the building collapsed. If someone was standing outside and looking at it from a distance, it would certainly be a jaw-dropping scene. However, everyone inside it was too shocked and stunned to do anything. Not that anyone would know what to do.

Extreme fear and hopelessness were followed by numbness. The barrage was getting closer and closer and the vibration of their eardrums was getting stronger. The explosions seemed like non-stop thunderstorms. Luo Yuan immediately sensed the danger. He knew it would not be a smart move to continue to stay there. There were so many explosions happening around them that even if the missiles exploded in the sky and did not hit anyone, they would still cause lots of damage to the buildings. He looked at the cracks on the ceiling and the falling dust, and made the decision to leave.

"This place is not safe anymore. Follow me!" Luo Yuan pulled Huang Jiahui along.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"To the district underground parking area. It's very close. You carry Wang Shishi. Hurry up, or it will be too late!" Luo Yuan said.

"Uncle, I want to walk by myself. I don't want to slow Auntie down." Wang Shishi raised her chin and looked at Luo Yuan.

He looked back at this young girl, who should have been enjoying freedom in school, but had been forced to face the ugly side of life instead. He nodded his head. "Alright. Jiahui, you take care of her."

"Are you heading to the parking area?" a middle-aged man asked.

"I think this building is going to collapse soon. Let's all go together if you want to leave too," Luo Yuan said. Everyone suddenly looked at him.

Other than the middle-aged man, everyone else seemed anxious and hesitant about whether they should leave the building or not. Apparently, while they knew it was not safe to stay in the building, they were also afraid to bump into the green beetles on the way to the underground parking area.

Luo Yuan looked at the crowd and asked, "We're leaving soon. Is

anyone else coming with us?”

Most of them chose to stay instead of risk their lives and face that challenge. In the end, only three guys and one woman followed Luo Yuan. One of them was the guy with the black-framed spectacles from yesterday. The rifle that Huang Jiahui was holding was actually quite helpful to them as it gave them the confidence to leave. Luo Yuan opened the grill and the seven of them walked out of the building. The crowd immediately closed it again. Luo Yuan turned around and looked at the complicated expressions on their faces before he took a deep breath and ran away.

Chapter 36: Aftermath Of The Attack

The war had caused mass destruction and made the green beetles fly around recklessly as if they were in a stew.

Once they went out, Luo Yuan saw a giant shadow. It was too near to see with the naked eye, but he almost felt like going back.

Fortunately, the giant thing was driven mad by a distant noise and was not aware of the food walking by right under its nose.

Luo Yuan was holding his knife tightly in his right hand and was on guard while they quickly run towards the underground parking area. The parking area was located by the entrance of the Jingyue District. It was just a few hundred meters away, but that seemed very far at that particular moment.

Wang Shishi could easily keep up with them at the beginning, but as their speed got faster, she started getting exhausted and her face turned pale. After all, she was still very young and thin, so her speed and stamina were not comparable to an adult's.

However, she persisted, trying her best to keep up.

About two minutes later, they finally reached the underground parking area, which was full of dusty cars that had been abandoned by their owners. Luo Yuan checked around and killed a few green beetles that had been hiding in there. Everyone felt relieved as they sat down unceremoniously on the dusty floor and gasped for air.

Other than Luo Yuan, Huang Jiahui and Wang Shishi, there was also a couple who seemed to be still passionately in love. The moment they sat down, they started hugging and comforting each other, and generally acting as if no one else was present. The rest were two middle-aged men with big bellies and the bespectacled guy.

“I’m Cheng Guohua, my friend. How shall I call you?” a middle-aged man asked as he shifted nearer to Luo Yuan, trying to win his favor.

“I’m Luo.”

The middle-aged man did not seem to mind Luo Yuan’s cold and indifferent manner and continued, “Brother Luo, you used to practice, right? You’re so skilled. If I knew what would happen today, I would have trained myself.”

Luo Yuan smiled and said nothing.

“What does the future hold for us? This war will turn Donghu City to ruins,” Cheng Guohua sighed.

“The country could be rebuilt, right?” Huang Jiahui said, curling her lips.

“Hehe... rebuilt, you say? Under the current conditions, do you know how many resources we would need to rebuild the whole

country? I think the only solution is a massive relocation!” Cheng Guohua said firmly.

Luo Yuan agreed. Crude oil had been categorized as an essential war resource, and the lack of energy as well as the transportation issues would make rebuilding the city an enormous project.

Cheng Guohua sounded pleased, “I think food will get more expensive, and we will all die of starvation if we don’t have money! Oh, can I take a look at your knife?”

Luo Yuan suddenly looked at him seriously and declined, “No.”

The middle-aged man had not thought that Luo Yuan would reject him so directly. He looked tense for a while before he gave him a confident smile and said, “Don’t be so mean. I can pay you a satisfactory price for this knife. It would be enough for you to live in another place. I am interested in buying it.”

Luo Yuan looked at him like an idiot.

“What is it?” the middle-aged man asked.

“Nothing. How much you can offer?” Luo Yuan suddenly felt interested in his offer after the past few days of oppression.

The middle-aged man felt energized. He had tried hard to win Luo Yuan’s favor in order to buy his knife. After all, he could tell how precious it was by the way Luo Yuan had used it to hack the

green beetle.

Nobody could be secure without a weapon for self-defense. It was useless to rely on others, and that included the police. He would much rather buy the rifle, but he dared not ask as he could tell that the rifle was a treasure that was not for sale. Therefore, his best option was to buy himself the knife.

He remained silent for a while, guessing what the right price would be, before he said proudly, "Five hundred thousand!"

"Ha!" Huang Jiahui, who was sitting beside him, snorted.

"It seems that the Jingyue District doesn't really have any rich men," Luo Yuan sighed.

As the middle-aged man was jeered by the beautiful woman, he glowered. "What about one million?"

"How much rice can a million buy? Do you think we're still in the old days? Ten million would be just perfect," Huang Jiahui interrupted him scornfully.

"Poverty must have driven you mad. This is outright robbery," the middle-aged man cursed inside his mind. The fact that she was holding a gun prevented him from cursing her directly.

The inflation was very high. People could buy less with one million than what they could buy with one hundred thousand in

the old days. Plus, there were a lot of things that money could not buy, things that could only be traded with food. One hundred thousand was not enough to buy Luo Yuan's knife. That price had to be multiplied by one hundred.

The middle-aged man was so enraged that he would not speak another word, much like the bespectacled guy. The couple was still kissing and hugging.

As the barrage gradually got closer, the earth started to shake.

Suddenly, Luo Yuan felt an unexpected throbbing in his heart and he pushed both Huang Jiahui and Wang Shishi to the ground. He didn't have time to say a word before an ear-splitting sound swallowed everything.

“Boom!”

A missile suddenly blew up with a loud crash over the district.

They all felt a loud buzzing in their ears before there was total silence.

The woman of the couple suddenly touched her ears and felt something wet. When she took a look, she saw blood on her hands. She was stunned for a while. Then she suddenly felt a chill and she screamed, only to find out that she could not hear anything.

She wanted to stand up, but her boyfriend was hugging her

tightly, so she just wailed.

“Boom! Boom! Boom!”

Missiles blew up one after another, heating the whole underground parking area up to 45 degrees Celsius. The powerful explosion had used up most of the oxygen in the air and left the people feeling like they were suffocating.

Fortunately, the explosion above them lasted for only 30 seconds before it moved on.

Luo Yuan continued prostrating for a little longer until the explosion had gone far enough. Then he got off Wang Shishi and Huang Jiahui. Both Huang Jiahui and Wang Shishi got up as well. Wang Shishi was blushing, but nobody knew what she was thinking about.

“Let’s go out and take a look,” Luo Yuan said softly.

“Okay!” Huang Jiahui responded, holding his hand tightly as they walked towards the exit of the parking area.

The others followed them.

Parts of the exit had collapsed and the floor was full of gravel. The thin edge of the wall had broken, forming several crevices.

Luo Yuan took a look at the exit and considered himself lucky. If the collapsed area were larger, the consequences would have been dreadful.

When they walked out of the parking area, they were stunned by what they saw.

The whole district had turned into ruins. All the buildings looked dilapidated and dangerous, and whole blocks had collapsed. Luo Yuan turned pale. When he had recovered, he walked quickly to his house. He made a turn and saw the block where he stayed.

A large crack had formed from the sixth floor to the first floor and the wall had dropped off, revealing the interior of the house.

Even though the building was barely supporting itself and was no longer safe to live in, Luo Yuan was relieved.

He kept lots of supplies inside his room and they would definitely be worth a big amount of money now.

Everyone grinned.

They walked quickly towards the entrance and found that the iron door was still closed tight. There appeared to be no movement from the inside.

Luo Yuan felt a chill as he came to a stop.

Cheng Guohua walked to the front and knocked on the door hard, but nobody answered it. He muttered under his breath, took out a key from his pocket and opened the iron door.

Next thing they knew, his face had turned very pale and he'd walked a few steps backward and tumbled down on the floor.

"They're dead, they're all dead," he muttered.

They looked through the door and saw more than ten corpses lying in a mess on the floor. The bodies had apparently been blasted to death as their faces were deformed and bleeding. Even more gruesome was the fact that their limbs were still twitching.

Wang Shishi was so frightened that she hid behind Luo Yuan.

Luo Yuan was used to seeing dead bodies, so he recovered from the shock quite quickly and told Huang Jiahui, who still hadn't recovered, "We can no longer stay here. Both of you wait for me here while I go get something!"

"I'll go with you!" Huang Jiahui said.

"I want to come too!" said Wang Shishi stubbornly as she stepped out from behind Luo Yuan's back.

"Both of you stay here. I'm afraid money might lead people to

commit crimes. The city is in a terrible mess. Please be careful,” Luo Yuan smiled stiffly.

“Okay, you too. Please be careful, the building may collapse at any time,” Huang Jiahui said with concern.

“Okay!” Luo Yuan nodded.

He crossed over the bodies and walked towards the fourth floor.

It was very dangerous as some parts of the staircase had already collapsed. Although some areas were still intact, they were full of cracks and crevices. Fortunately, the collapsed areas were not too large, the biggest one being only about five or six steps. With his ability, it was not a big deal.

However, even though he was very careful, he came very close to falling down a couple of times.

After about 10 minutes, Luo Yuan finally reached the fourth floor.

The security door was no longer at its original position, and the hallway that led from the staircase to his room had already collapsed and fallen onto the third floor.

He jumped over the two-meter path directly into his own room.

The living room had a huge hole in it and the only furniture - a couch - had also fallen onto the third floor.

However, the storeroom beside the living room was still intact.

There were eight bags of grains, some medicine, snacks, salty eggs, salty vegetables, canned meat, and several large bags of toilet paper. When Luo Yuan had gone grocery shopping, he'd bought everything in sight and as a result there were lots of unused supplies.

As he looked at them, it became apparent that he could not carry them down the stairs. He could only throw them down.

Luo Yuan took off the wooden block and opened the window.

He called for Huang Jiahui to grab them from downstairs and then threw the bags of grains down.

The bags were not strong enough and most of them burst open when they hit the ground. He could not help that.

When Luo Yuan had thrown everything, he looked back towards the kitchen. He thought it would be a pity to leave the pickled meat to be devoured by the rats.

Chapter 37: Communication Gap

When Luo Yuan headed back down, half the staircase on the third floor collapsed, almost causing him to fall.

As he walked out of the building, the others surrounded him.

“Brother Luo, would you like to earn some money? If you bring my things out, I shall remunerate you fairly,” Cheng Guohua said airily, confident that Luo Yuan would say yes. He had tried to go up earlier, but he had retreated as the building looked too dangerous for him.

“We will, too. As long as you bring our things out, I will pay you,” the man of the couple said in a softer tone.

Luo Yuan was fed up. He had to hold himself back from slapping him. His face darkened as he said, “My life is worth more than you can pay me. You couldn’t afford me if you sold yourselves. Go look for somebody else.”

As soon as he finished his sentence, he turned away, not waiting to see Cheng Guohua’s reaction. He was afraid that he might not be able to control himself and would end up beating the man up.

The grains had been scattered all over the place and both Huang Jiahui and Wang Shishi were trying to gather them with their hands.

“Everything else is intact, but the bags were torn and about half the grains are scattered. We could get them back if we had a sack,” Huang Jiahui said in distress when she saw Luo Yuan head over.

Grains had always been precious, but even more so now that the end of the world seemed to be approaching. Fear had caused many people to try and buy as much as possible, which had resulted in a grain shortage all around the country. Furthermore, the crops that used to be taken care of could no longer compete against the weeds, which had proved resistant to high-concentration weedicide sprays. Therefore, the fields around the country were being neglected and grains were in short supply. If the issue was not solved or a new high-competence species was discovered, they would be facing starvation on a larger scale. Grains were always the main food source during a war.

Luo Yuan looked both left and right; everywhere around him was complete devastation. It would be very difficult to find sacks. He sighed and said, “I’ll look around, but I’m not very hopeful. If only that jeep was still here. I thought I earned it, but I somehow feel the loss now.”

“Oh yes! Why I didn’t think of that? There are so many cars in the parking area, it’s a waste to just leave them there. Why don’t we use them?” Huang Jiahui said brightly.

“Weren’t you a cop? And yet you know how to steal a car?” Luo Yuan looked at her, completely stunned.

“What?” Huang Jiahui felt uneasy being looked at that way. She seemed vexed as she said, “My dad used to have an old car with lots

of issues. He had to start the engine manually most of the time. That's why I know. I have seen it many times. Unfortunately, many cars today use the battery to start the engine. Hmmm...I wonder if there are any old cars in the parking area."

"You can go look for one while I will wait for you here!" Luo Yuan did not want to ask about her family. It seemed like a taboo subject at the time.

Huang Jianhui clapped her hands and stood up. "I will check it out then. Hopefully I will find one."

"Please look for some gasoline as well. With so many cars there, there must be some leftover. Get as much as possible. I'll get you a container." Luo Yuan looked around, but all he could find was a can of prunes. He poured them all out and put them into Wang Shishi's hands while he passed the empty can to Huang Jiahui. "Just use this to scoop it up!"

She rolled her eyes and said, "Can I have your knife, too?"

"What do you need it for?" Luo Yuan asked curiously.

"The mouth of a gas tank is not all that big. Unless I open it up with the knife, how will I be able to scoop the gasoline up with this prune can? Should I use the rifle?" Huang Jiahui said impatiently, her tone full of resentment. Of course she would complain. She was a beautiful woman being asked to go get some stinking gasoline.

Luo Yuan smiled embarrassedly as he passed her the knife.

Huang Jiahui stared at him before she turned and walked towards the parking area.

Luo Yuan looked at Wang Shishi who was still working hard on gathering the grains. He patted her on the shoulder and said, "Alright, you can stop and rest for a while. I've got something to ask you."

He led her to a place farther away from the building and sat down.

Wang Shishi also sat down apprehensively. "Uncle?"

Luo Yuan looked at her and knew that she was worried. It was normal for a little girl who had lost her parents to feel insecure, and be scared of anything happening for fear of being abandoned again. Which was exactly what he wanted to talk to her about. He said gently, "Sweetie, please don't think any nonsense. How could I abandon you? You're too cute. Plus, I have more than enough food to share with you."

Wang Shishi blushed slightly and peeped at him. "Thanks, Uncle. Or maybe I'll just call you Brother Luo from now on!"

"That's up to you," Luo Yuan said indifferently. It was just a name after all. "Also, please don't restrict yourself next time, or people may think that I'm mistreating you. Just do whatever you

want.”

“By the way, have you noticed any changes on your body recently? Do you feel stronger, for example?” Luo Yuan asked. He was thinking that the small amount of marinated rat meat that they’d been having for every meal lately might have had some kind of effect on her.

Wang Shishi thought for a while before she said, “I think I feel a little stronger. I used to get a stomachache whenever I run a small distance during gym class, but now I can run faster and my stomach does not ache either!”

Wang Shishi hesitated a little before she added, “And there’s been some other changes too.” Then she blushed and bowed her head.

“What changes?” Luo Yuan asked as he thought to himself, “Don’t tell me she has evolved?” He knew that the identification technique that could be used to cook food was not able to trigger evolution.

“Brother Luo...” Wang Shishi’s face was blushing a deep red. She twisted her shirt in her fingers as she said, “I...I think my breasts have gotten bigger, and every time I eat rat meat I feel like they’re swelling.”

Luo Yuan instinctively looked at Wang Shishi’s breasts and found that they had indeed changed. Her chest, that used to be almost flat and only slightly stuck out, had now become bigger and the

two dots in the middle were hard and pointed. It was obvious that she was not wearing any underwear.

Unfortunately, there was no girly underwear inside the house.

Wang Shishi felt shy under Luo Yuan's gaze. Her breathing became heavy and quick as she said in a low voice, "Brother Luo, I know boys like touching girls' breasts. You can touch them if you want to."

Luo Yuan blushed slightly when he heard her and said angrily, "Who told you this? Why would you learn such naughty things at such a young age?"

Wang Shishi started trembling in fear. Her eyes turned red and tears slid out as she said, "Brother Luo, I haven't done anything naughty. My ex-boyfriend always wanted to touch me but I never let him."

In other words, she had wanted him to touch her, but instead of showing gratitude, he had scolded her.

Boyfriend? Luo Yuan was speechless as he looked at Wang Shishi, whose body had just started to develop. He had always thought of himself as someone pure. He had only gotten himself a girlfriend when he'd gone to university, and they'd had intimate relations only after they'd been dating for a year. He felt that he had distanced himself from society and was no longer able to follow the latest trends.

“Okay, okay, I’m sorry. I should not have said that you’re a bad girl. Please stop crying,” Luo Yuan tried to comfort her. He had initially wanted to educate her, but he gave up eventually. At least what she’d said proved that she was a kind, grateful girl. Her method had just been a little unorthodox.

As he talked, Wang Shishi felt even worse. Tears kept rolling down her cheeks as she sobbed, “You’re such a hypocrite, saying that you don’t want to touch me...when you have been touching me all along.”

“What?” Luo Yuan was shocked. He tried to think back, but he could not recall what she was referring to. Confused, he asked, “Are you kidding me? When did I touch you?”

“At the parking area. When you pushed me down, your hand was on my breast...It still hurts!” Wang Shishi said, pursing her lips.

“Did I?” Luo Yuan said embarrassedly. It had been an emergency, so he hadn’t payed much attention. He did not even know where he had put his hands.

Luo Yuan apologized and talked to her for a while before Wang Shishi finally stopped crying.

An old Volkswagen Santana that was missing a door drove over, making a deep rumbling sound. It stopped beside the pile of supplies.

Huang Jiahui got out from the car. She seemed to be in a bad mood as her face and hands were stained with greasy black oil. She strode over to Luo Yuan and stared at him. When she noticed Wang Shishi's puffy eyes, she asked, "Why are her eyes red? Have you been bullying her?"

"Who do you think I am? Do I look like a bully to you?" Luo Yuan said sincerely, feeling guilty at the same time.

Huang Jiahui blushed slightly as she thought, "I'm not sure what kind of person you are. If we hadn't been found, somebody would have killed us while I was still in a daze."

She continued to gaze at Luo Yuan, looking like a typical policewoman interrogating a criminal.

"Ask Wang Shishi if you don't believe me!" Luo Yuan tried to defend himself.

"Uncle... Brother Luo did not bully me. I started crying because I was thinking of my parents!" Wang Shishi said in a lower voice, peeping up at Luo Yuan.

"Did you hear? Do you understand now? You cops only know how to accuse others. It's turning into an occupational disease. Alright, let's start moving things. We'll look for a place to stay and then we'll take it from there," Luo Yuan said brightly, feeling relieved. He stood up and walked towards the pile of supplies.

Huang Jiahui looked at Wang Shishi doubtfully again. She had observed a light grey handprint on her chest. It could only be seen if somebody looked closely. Had she not been in the police for so many years, she might have missed it.

“And I in the wrong here? He is a total beast, who won’t even leave a little girl alone. I just left for a minute and he already got to her,” Huang Jiahui thought as Luo Yuan walked away. She stopped Wang Shishi before she could follow him. “You must not stay alone with him again, do you hear?” she said earnestly. “Don’t go into his bedroom either. If he tries to do anything to you, you must say no.”

“Sister Huang, Brother Luo is a good man,” Wang Shishi defended Luo Yuan.

“He has a good character, but not when it comes to others. You may not understand yet, but he wants to get you alone...” Huang Jiahui said patiently.

“Sister Huang, I already knew this. Many girls my age have sex. If Brother Luo wanted to, I’d be willing. Now let’s go move the supplies!” Wang Shishi walked towards Luo Yuan as soon as she finished her sentence. Huang Jianhui was left standing there speechless for quite a long time.

Chapter 38: Realization

The white rice on the surface was quite clean, but the rest had for the most part been stained by green beetle bodily fluids. The grains had also been mixed with green beetle skeletons scraps, which made them utterly disgusting. Luo Yuan wanted to throw them all away but he was stopped by Huang Jiahui who felt that it wasn't right to waste food.

The trunk of the Volkswagen Santana was not big enough to fit everything, so Luo Yuan pushed down the back seat to make space for the supplies. The car was completely full.

“Alright, let's go!” Luo Yuan got into the driver's seat.

Huang Jiahui rode shotgun with Wang Shishi sitting on her lap. When they took their seats, Luo Yuan started the engine. He drove to the entrance of the district, and then turned back and took a look around the area, which was almost in ruins. It suddenly occurred to him that he may no longer be able to come back.

There were more people walking down the street. They had just been bombarded with a barrage of weapons, and some of them looked happy to be alive while others were crying loudly, seeing corpses of green beetles lie everywhere around the devastated city.

Luo Yuan felt that the scene was both familiar and unfamiliar at the same time, but he could no longer blend in. He remained silent while he drove on slowly. Not long after, he saw a guard rank green beetle near a dilapidated roadside café.

Its stomach had been blasted open and disgusting liquid was dripping from a wound the size of a table, forming a large pool of sticky fluid on the ground. The formidable insect was still trying to stay alive, flapping hard its only wing and creating a strong wind that almost blew the café tables away. It was struggling to stand up, but without a complete set of limbs and wings, its struggles proved pointless.

Luo Yuan just looked at it while he continued to drive.

Even though it was badly injured, the fierce insect would still be able to kill him despite his experience killing one of its kind.

Besides, he knew that he had only succeeded by pure luck. Considering luck might not be on his side every time, it would be very risky to fight this fierce organism. If he decided to, he would have to avoid any mistakes because his body defense was too weak. The guard rank green beetle could defend itself from bullet attacks, but all it would take for Luo Yuan to die would be one shot.

The road started to vibrate slightly and a roaring engine noise came from afar.

At the crossroads, they saw five armored cars and three large trucks rumbling. Luo Yuan turned the steering wheel and gave way.

There were about seven people loading heavy machine guns onto

the trucks. They looked towards Luo Yuan solemnly.

The group was obviously on cleaning duty as Luo Yuan could see that several of the trucks, which were more than 10 meters long, were carrying a guard rank green beetle.

Seeing it made him get lost in thought. Other than collecting the guard rank green beetles for research purposes, their main purpose had to be to produce more evolved men. The human evolution percentage was small, only one in a thousand. However, if the army cardinal number was one hundred thousand, then the evolved men in the army had to be about a hundred. If the number was a million, then there would be a thousand evolved men.

In fact, the odds could be even higher than that.

The general public's disgust in eating raw green beetle was definitely not an issue in the army. Discipline and obedience had already been engraved deep into the men's souls. Therefore, he had no doubt that, given an order from their superior, they would squeeze those sick things into their mouths and swallow them without hesitation.

He suddenly felt scared as he realized that he was not truly ready to face the end of the world. Even though he knew these things could give him a chance to evolve, he still insisted on not touching them because he found them disgusting.

“Why aren't you driving?” Huang Jiahui did not want to talk to him, but she could not help it when she saw that Luo Yuan had

stopped for such a long time.

“Finally, I’m convinced of one thing,” Luo Yuan said brightly when he recovered.

“What are you talking about?” Huang Jiahui asked. She was too curious not to.

“Would you eat a green beetle if you knew there was something in it that would provide you with a chance to evolve?” Luo Yuan asked as he started the engine and drove towards the junction.

“Evolve? Are you kidding me?” Huang Jiahui said scornfully. She didn’t go online that often, nor was she in possession of any classified information, so she didn’t know anything about the existence of the evolved man.

“I know about the evolved man. It’s everywhere in the internet,” said Wang Shishi.

“Does the evolved man really exist?” Huang Jiahui inquired doubtfully.

“Do I look like I’m kidding?” Luo Yuan said while he drove.

“Then of course I would eat a green beetle. Only an idiot wouldn’t eat it,” Huang Jiahui said indifferently. She did not believe Luo Yuan. What he was saying seemed too absurd to her to be true.

“Brother Luo, I want to eat one too!” said Wang Shishi in a low voice.

“We can have as much as we want later. We’ll eat until we’re are so full that we can’t eat anymore,” said Luo Yuan with a mysterious smile on his face.

Several ambulances were driving over, followed by more emergency vehicles arriving one after the other.

A few minutes later, Luo Yuan pulled up in front of a hotel. The four-floor building was the one in the best condition around the area.

He opened the door and got out of the car. The glass door was in shatters and the ground floor was covered in thick dust, indicating that the hotel had been closed down for some time now.

“Let’s stay here. We can choose any room we want,” Luo Yuan said as he walked inside and took a look.

Huang Jiahui walked in as well. “Isn’t it odd?” she said, “What if the owner comes over later?”

“This is a hotel. If the owner comes, we’ll just pay. Considering its condition, he won’t charge us much,” Luo Yuan laughed.

Huang Jiahui did not say much after that.

The two of them found a luxury suite on the third floor and started to carry in their belongings. By the time they were done, it was already noon. Huang Jiahui had just gone into the bathroom when he heard her fretful voice.

“There’s no water supply anymore?”

“No water supply? But there was one this morning!” Luo Yuan looked gloomy, but he wasn’t that surprised. “I’ll go look for the main valve downstairs and check whether it has been switched off.”

He headed downstairs quickly. He had to search for more than 10 minutes before he found the valve inside the storeroom on the first floor. He was disappointed to find out that it was open. He walked out of the hotel and towards the already closed down restaurant just across the street.

He walked into the kitchen and turned on the tap water. “Crap.” The water pipe made a sound but no water flowed out.

Luo Yuan walked back to the hotel gloomily.

“There’s no water supply! Not in the restaurant across the street either!” Luo Yuan flopped down on the sofa in disappointment. “The bombing today was too intense. Maybe the water supply was also affected. Luckily we still have about ten bottles of mineral

water. We can no longer stay in Donghu City, though. We have to move somewhere else.”

Huang Jiahui sighed and sat down, a scowling expression on her face. “Move where?” she asked.

Luo Yuan thought for a while before he said, “Let’s go to Hedong City. As a capital city, there should be at least one group of army troops there. The conditions will be a lot better.”

When Luo Yuan was calm, he could be very good at convincing others. Huang Jiahui felt reassured. “Alright, you decide then,” she said.

“We’re leaving for Hedong City tomorrow morning!” Luo Yuan decided. “You got enough gas for the car, right? We don’t want to get stuck in the middle of nowhere.”

“Gas won’t be a problem. As long as the car doesn’t break down.”

Luo Yuan frowned.

Huang Jiahui rushed to add, “Hedong City is about 100 kilometers away from Donghu City, and this Volkswagen Santana 2000 is maintained quite nicely, so it should be alright.”

“That’s good then, or else we’d have to pick up another car. Everything’s a mess now, so I don’t know who we would buy one from. Let’s eat something. Get the bag of bread. We’ll just have

that today.” Luo Yuan touched his stomach. He had been in an intense mode all day, so he had not felt like eating although he’d had the bag of the bread. As a result, he was starving.

Huang Jiahui stood up to get the bag from the living room, but she was stopped by Luo Yuan. “Wait, let’s not eat right away. I’m worried you might both vomit. Let me get something from downstairs.”

Luo Yuan walked out.

Both Huang Jiahui and Wang Shishi were confused and felt like something bad was about to happen.

“Sister Huang, what’s Brother Luo going to do?” Wang Shishi asked curiously.

“I don’t know. But I have a feeling it’s not something good,” Huang Jiahui said as she tried to look calm.

They waited for about 30 minutes before Luo Yuan finally came back. He was holding a piece of green beetle exoskeleton in his hands. Judging by the color of the exoskeleton, it had to belong to a guard rank green beetle. Luo Yuan had searched around the area, but that was all he had managed to find.

According to the identification technique, the probability of evolution was the same for both the regular green beetle and the guard rank green beetle. This vague description could be

inaccurate, though. For example, the probability of three in a thousand, seven in a thousand and even ten in a thousand could all be the bare minimum, but their sizes were entirely different and that difference could have a huge impact.

Luo Yuan believed that the probability to evolve by eating a guard rank green beetle was stronger than that of eating a regular green beetle. But even if the probability proved to be the same, he would not suffer much of a loss.

Luo Yuan put the exoskeleton on the table. It made a loud snapping sound.

Huang Jiahui and Wang Shishi suddenly recalled what Luo Yuan had said in the car. Both their faces turned green as they shook their heads.

Luo Yuan looked at the two of them retreating. He believed that they had to eat because they had already agreed to it. He had to eat too. After all, it would be more fair if everyone suffered together.

Like a salesman, Luo Yuan tried to convince them, “I have already cleared all the inner organs and bodily fluids. It’s only the muscles left. It’s extremely nutrient-rich, way better than any supplement in the world. Plus, it will also give you a small chance to evolve. Even if it doesn’t though, it will still enhance all your body functions.”

“Huang Jiahui, would you like to have a superpower and still survive even after all mankind has perished?”

“Wang Shishi, I know you always feel insecure. Would you like to change and not be afraid anymore?”

“Human life is no longer that valuable. Do you know how many people were killed just today? It must have been more than one hundred thousand. If we hadn’t been lucky enough to hide in the underground parking area, we would have died too. But the war isn’t over yet. We might have been able to survive today, but what about tomorrow? It’s worth to suffer a little now if it means that we can get the power to protect ourselves.”

Wang Shishi listened to him as she clenched her fists. She felt her blood boil and her eyes sparkle. “Yes, I...I want to become stronger, Brother Luo. I’ll eat.”

Huang Jiahui was also brimming with emotion. “I’ll eat too, I’ll get a wok now!” she said excitedly.

Luo Yuan gave them an odd smirk as he said lightly, “Why would we need a wok? That’s too much trouble. Plus, this thing has to be eaten raw, or it will lose its effect.”

Huang Jiahui looked terrified. She stumbled a few steps back, her eyes were widening. She looked at the ivory white muscles on the green beetle exoskeleton, then back at Luo Yuan. She swallowed a mouthful of saliva before she said in confusion, “Eat...eat raw?”

Wang Shishi had turned pale. She felt sick to her stomach, and she suddenly covered her mouth and rushed into the bathroom.

Chapter 39: Evacuation

After spending a long time trying to get mentally prepared and an even longer time hesitating, they eventually ate.

Their suffering was indescribable. Luo Yuan was able to hold the food down, but both Huang Jiahui and Wang Shishi ate, vomited and then resumed eating again until they all they were able to vomit anymore was gastric acid. They seemed to be in great pain, and tears rolled uncontrollably down their faces.

Unfortunately, though it was not clear whether it was because of their bodies qualities or because the probability to evolve from this blue color level organism was too low, none of them had evolved by the end of the day. Luo Yuan felt better. He had already failed once, so he was just slightly disappointed. However, it was a big blow to both Huang Jiahui and Wang Shishi.

They had suffered so much and had seen no results whatsoever. Both Huang Jiahui and Wang Shishi felt secretly angry at him.

They said didn't say a word to him the whole night.

At midnight, Luo Yuan was awakened by the sudden vibration of a text message.

He took out his phone, and turned the screen slightly brighter. In order to save battery, Luo Yuan's phone was constantly kept in dark screen. Nonetheless, his phone had still only one last bar of battery left. The rest of the battery had already been used up.

Luo Yuan was surprised. The message was from his ex-colleague, Wang Xianguang. Ever since he had resigned from the company, they had barely contacted each other, and lately they had no longer been keeping in touch. He could not believe that he had received a message from her.

“Luo Yuan, we are going to leave with the fifth division soon. I just got the news that we will depart from the East Highway at 6.30 a.m. If you want to leave, please come over as soon as possible. Reply as soon as you receive my text!”

Luo Yuan stared at the screen for quite a while.

Then he quickly turned over, stood up and put on his clothes.

It was already 5.30 a.m. and the departure was scheduled at 6.30 a.m., so he had only one hour left to get ready. He needed to rush.

He had also planned on leaving Donghu City that day, but considering the current situation, nobody knew what would happen to them on the road. At least if they were escorted by the army, their safety would be guaranteed.

He walked out of the room and knocked loudly on the door of Huang Jiahui's bedroom.

“Fast! Wake up! The army is leaving Donghu City at 6.30 a.m. It'd be better if we went with them. We're running out of time, please

hurry!”

The sound of something falling on the floor came from the inside of the bedroom.

“Okay, okay, coming!” Were it not for the fear that Huang Jiahui had to deal with every day, which had made her more sensitive and alert, she would have taken more time to get out of bed. Now though, she had jumped up instantly when she’d heard something.

Wang Shishi had already started putting on her clothes in a hurry as well.

When the two of them came out, Luo Yuan had already finished washing his face and rinsing his mouth.

“Luckily we already moved all the supplies back into the car yesterday evening, or we’d be too late,” Luo Yuan said gladly.

“How did you know that the army is leaving?” Huang Jiahui asked doubtfully. She had taken a bottle of mineral water from the living room and she looked like she was about to brush her teeth.

“Don’t brush your teeth now, do it on the road. It’s 5.40 a.m. and we have 50 minutes left only. I got the news from my ex-colleague, so it’s from a reliable source. Doesn’t your husband work in some kind of government department? How come he didn’t tell you?”

“Don’t mention him again. We’ve already been separated for a

long time. Besides, my phone is dead. Even he wanted to contact me, he wouldn't be able to reach me," Huang Jiahui said, clearly annoyed. Then she turned towards the bathroom and packed her personal belongings inside a plastic bag.

When they had finished packing, they walked down the staircase in a hurry and jumped into the Santana 2000, whose passenger door had been broken.

It was already January and it was considered winter season. Although the temperature was abnormal, the winter's short day and long night remained the same. It was about 6 a.m. and the sky was still dark.

Luo Yuan wanted to switch on the front lights, but he discovered that the lights of the old car had already been broken.

"F*ck! Stupid f*cking car!"

"We're lucky that we even have a car!" Huang Jiahui said unhappily as she was the one who had picked up the car.

Wisely, Luo Yuan did not pick a fight with her. He started the car in the dark, stepped on the accelerator and drove towards the highway trying to see under the dim light of the wee hours.

After two days of bombing, the road surface was full of stones and pebbles of various sizes; it had even cracked open in places. When they had passed by yesterday on their way there, he had

driven rather slowly so they hadn't noticed a thing. However, when he accelerated now, the whole car started to bump along the road.

Huang Jiahui's face had turned pale. She looked as scared as she would be riding a roller coaster. Plus, she was sitting on the passenger seat, and the door had been chopped off on that side while she was stealing the car. She did not know whether she had chopped it down to save them the trouble or just to vent her anger. She also had to take care of Wang Shishi, so she almost got thrown out when the car started bumping vigorously.

After a while, she could no longer bear it and shouted, "Wait! I can't stand it anymore. Let me drive!"

"Can you see the road clearly?" Luo Yuan asked as he stepped on the brakes. His eyesight was quite good and had gotten even better after his body's inner qualities had been upgraded. He did not possess the night vision ability yet, but it was already early in the morning and the sun had started to rise, so he could roughly make out the road. If he didn't, the ride would have been even bumpier.

Huang Jiahui rubbed her aching butt while she limped over to the driver's seat, glowering. "If I didn't have good eyesight, would I have been able to place third in a shooting competition? Open the door and I'll let you enjoy the ride too!"

Luo Yuan felt reluctant as he had not driven much after getting his driver's license. He looked at Wang Shishi and said, "Where shall Wang Shishi sit? She's a little girl and she can't just sit on my lap, can she?"

She was speechless for a moment. She had not thought of this. She looked at the slight shyness on Wang Shishi's face and thought of the handprint left on her chest yesterday. "Oh, now you act like a gentleman! Don't you think I don't know what happened! Get out of the car!"

Luo Yuan had no choice but to obey.

They changed seats, and Wang Shishi blushed as she sat down on Luo Yuan's lap.

Huang Jiahui restarted the engine. She drove like she wanted to vent her anger. She drove more crazily than Luo Yuan had, like she was driving a cross country vehicle instead of a Santana 2000.

Huang Jiahui peeped at Luo Yuan blissfully, but she was disappointed to see him sitting still. In fact, he was sitting so still that he looked like his body had been glued to the seat. As the car continued bumping, she was amazed and disappointed at the same time. She did not notice Wang Shishi's face blushing a deep red color.

The number of cars was increasing, and many were driving towards the same direction as them. As they got nearer to the highway entrance, there were even more cars. They had to stop for a few minutes after a short while of driving.

Soon, the old car finally stopped for good at a location about 1 km away from the highway entrance.

There were countless cars there, blocking all six lanes. They were mostly luxurious cars that made the old Santana 2000 stand out even more among them.

The Mercedes-Benz 600 next to them lowered its window and a fat guy put his head out. “Hey bro, your car is such an antique!”

Luo Yuan laughed, “As long as it still runs. Anyway, who gave you the notice?”

“The municipal office. They didn’t tell you?” the fat guy asked in surprise.

“If my friend hadn’t told me, I wouldn’t be here!”

That was to be expected. Luo Yuan was not angry or disappointed. He had long gotten used to mankind’s pyramid system.

“You’re lucky then. I heard that those people from the municipal office are leaving too. Donghu City will be completely abandoned. The country cannot afford to rebuild it, so they can only move us to other places. Our group has it quite good, we’re protected by army troops. The rest will be evacuated in groups too, but they won’t receive much protection from the army.”

Huang Jiahui was not happy with what she was hearing. “Rich men always have it good. We’re only now sharing some of their

advantages.”

The fat guy did not seem to mind what she had said, but his smile became slightly bitter. “I’m so poor, all I’ve got left is money. I no longer have my company, my house, my wife or my kids. All I have is a bankbook with money that’s been devalued more than ten times. If my mindset was not good, I would have already committed suicide.”

It was not easy for anyone to survive during such a hard period. Luo Yuan sighed and switched the topic, “I see that there are many luxurious buses up front. Who are they transferring?”

The fat guy pursed his lips and teased, “University professors, professional technicians, researchers in the research institutes, and of course some civil servants. Their lives are more valuable than ours, and thus they are top priority. Donghu City has more light and service industry than heavy industry. Maybe you aren’t aware of it, but the provinces with heavy industry have already started to work on the war economy. The life of a professional technician is more important than the lives of a thousand university students.”

Apparently the fat guy was well-informed. Just as Luo Yuan was about to inquire for more information, he felt his phone vibrate. He took it out and saw that it was Wang Xianguang.

He picked it up.

“Luo Yuan, are you here?” Wang Xianguang asked, sounding

worried.

“Yes, I’m in the back!”

“Then please come faster, we are leaving soon.”

Luo Yuan hesitated for a while before he answered, “I don’t think I will. I’m here with my friends and we’re driving.”

Complete silence.

After a while, Luo Yuan thought he heard Wang Xianguang take a deep breath. “Well, then... good luck. I’ll see you there. I have to go now!”

Before Luo Yuan was able to say anything, Wang Xianguang had already hung up the phone.

Luo Yuan stared at it and saw that he had a few unread messages and two missed calls. He opened all the messages.

“Have you departed?”

“If you haven’t already, you will not make it. Where are you? I’ll get my dad to come pick you up!”

He had just remembered that he had not replied to her message

earlier, neither had he felt the vibration of his phone when she had called him.

He wanted to explain but after a long hesitation, he decided to explain it all later when they met again face-to-face.

Chapter 40: Lost Control

At 6.30 a.m., the vehicles started to move slowly.

There were a few hundreds of armored vehicles in front, followed by the troop-carrying vehicles. There were also about a hundred buses and about ten military helicopters circling around at low altitude. Luo Yuan and everybody else who owned a private car were the last in line, trailing behind them all.

Luo Yuan got behind the steering wheel before they departed again, pushing Wang Shishi back into Huang Jiahui's lap.

The body of the little girl had just started to develop, yet she was not innocent by any means. It was embarrassing for her to sit on his lap when some unwanted incident might occur at any moment. When he thought about their previous embarrassing moment, his head started to ache. He did not know what the little girl had thought.

The traffic was so long that it extended for a few kilometers, like a long worm crawling slowly on the road.

As they entered the highway, their speed gradually increased.

After about thirty minutes of driving, they had finally driven out of Donghu City and their surroundings gradually became more rural.

They did not know when it had started, but the whole highway seemed to have been reconstructed, and an approximately 50m wide concrete isolation belt had been built. The other side of the isolation belt looked like a separate world, one covered by greenery.

Luo Yuan looked at both sides while he drove, his heart filling with fear. Those plants were no longer mere weeds like they used to be in the old days. They had formed a whole jungle. While they drove through it, people felt like they were driving into a deep dark forest.

If Luo Yuan had not seen for himself, he would have thought that he was dreaming.

These plants seemed to have grown too fast.

It all seemed very dangerous as the isolation belt looked rough and dried blood stains could be seen everywhere. Luo Yuan even saw an animal corpse, which looked like a thin sheet of paper after being crushed repeatedly by the cars on the highway.

All that aside though, one could still sense the hidden danger by the steel concrete defenses and the rapid firing guns and heavy machine guns perched on top of them every kilometer.

Huang Jiahui looked at both sides and said worriedly, “What were those top rank officials thinking? Why are they letting the forest grow instead of burning it? Those green beetles might have come from this area!”

Luo Yuan smiled bitterly. “If they could, they would have already burned it. I think that they are no longer able to!”

“Why? Didn’t they burn it a few times over last time?” Huang Jiahui asked doubtfully.

“Yeah, but that was last time, when the situation was still under control. Large amounts of oil were being imported from the biggest producers in the world. But now international trading has stopped, and relying on only the few oil fields left in our country has already proved insufficient. What else they could use to burn these plants when they grow so fast?”

Huang Jiahui could not accept the truth. “Then we can no longer do anything to these plants?” she said absently.

“If we don’t have oil, we can use gas to burn them!” Wang Shishi could not help but interrupt.

This lame joke was so good that it had both Luo Yuan and Huang Jiahui laughing. That dissipated their depression for a while.

Wang Shishi was confused. When Huang Jiahui explained, she blushed.

“Of course there are some other methods, too. We could use alcohol if we don't have oil. The best raw material for producing alcohol is these plants, which are now in abundance. If we produce

a large enough amount of alcohol, we could replace oil by the end of the day. But it all depends on what the government is planning on doing.”

The cars in front suddenly stopped.

Luo Yuan used the emergency brake. At first, he had thought nothing of it. Accidents were common when it came to such big groups of cars. He thought that they would soon be moving again, but then he noticed a commotion up front, followed by the familiar sound of leather being torn off.

“Boom!”

He twisted his body out of the car and saw a military helicopter rolling sideways and dropping from the sky. A few seconds later, it slumped down on the isolation belt and exploded, producing a strong flame.

More than ten rapid firing guns were firing all at once, forming a long red-colored line. Their target was hundreds of mutated big black birds which had appeared in the sky. Some of them were shot down. Black feathers fell from the sky like rain, one of them landing on their car.

Luo Yuan was speechless for a while before he finally grabbed his Zhanmadao and got out of the car. As he did, he yelled, “Everybody get out of the car now!”

It was not safe to hide inside a car. It limited one's movement and when danger finally came, they were not able to do anything to avoid it.

Luo Yuan picked up the feather. It was about a meter in length, its surface was smooth and soft, and it was so light that he felt like he wasn't holding anything in his hand.

“Black owl tail feather”

“Use: Material”

“Rarity: Blue”

“Weight: 10g”

“Evaluation: This is the feather of a black owl. It's tough and light, and has some weak wind properties.”

Blue again!

As Luo Yuan looked at the feather, he became even more stressed.

He had been staying in the city, so he did not know how much the organisms outside it had evolved. He'd thought that blue level

organisms would be very rare, but he had not expected to come across so many of them in only a few days.

It made total sense, though. After all, the city was human territory and mutated animals would be killed on sight. That's why it was rare to come across a light blue level organism, let alone a blue level one. The probability was even lower than winning the lottery.

That's when he noticed the part about the wind properties.

If he remembered correctly, it was his second time seeing a description like that. The first one had been that old yellow dog at Zhao Yali's house, which had seemed to have fire properties. This time it was wind properties.

He raised his eyebrows slightly. Mutated animals with elemental properties were very rare. He had only come across two of them. Other organisms, such as the guard rank green beetle or the king ratsnake, which had made an unforgettable impression on him, had had no elemental properties whatsoever.

Could it be that these were the two types of mutated organisms?

Huang Jiahui got out of the car. She took a look at the sky and asked in alarm, "Will we be alright? Shall I take out the rifle?"

After some thought, Luo Yuan said, "No, it's alright. The rifle will not be effective on this type of animal. Besides, the army is up

front. If they knew that we have rifle, who knows what would happen.”

“How do you know it won’t be effective?”

Huang Jiahui was looking at him doubtfully, so he passed her the feather before he went on, “This is the feather of a mutated bird. It has strong flexibility, so if lots of them are stacked together, bullets will not penetrate them no matter how close the distance. You will only piss the bird off.”

People had started to open their car doors and look at the sky nervously. They were scared that the birds would attack them.

But they needn’t have worried. The black owls were distracted by the rapid firing guns and the military helicopters. They couldn’t care less about the crowd watching from the ground.

One by one, the owls were being shot down. After a few minutes, the remaining owls finally started to get scared. They gave a few shrill screams, fluttered their wings and flew away quickly from the area.

Luo Yuan had managed to collect five feathers before he got back into the driver’s seat.

“Why are you collecting the feathers?” Huang Jiahui asked.

“Who knows, maybe I can get some money for them,” he said

with a vague smile. Actually he was thinking of using them to perform the fusion technique. Though he had not thought what he would fuse yet, a feather with wind properties had to be a rare material. It would be a waste if he hadn't collected some.

“This can can get you money?” Huang Jiahui said in disbelief.

“Who knows? Didn't you see others collecting them too? Besides, if you sew them together, you can make a bullet-proof vest. Soon enough, lots of people will want to buy one.”

Immediately Huang Jiahui felt regretful. There had been lots of feathers falling at the time, so if she had wanted to, she would have definitely picked up a few. She did not think that they were worth any money, but she wanted to make a bullet-proof vest like the one Luo Yuan had mentioned. She had wanted one ever since she had found out that Luo Yuan was wearing that green bullet-proof vest he treasured so much. However, it was too late for her to collect any as most had already been collected by others.

The cars started to move again after a minute.

They were attacked a few more times along the way. It was not from the air though, and some of the attacks were averted easily before they could even reach the isolation belt. The few animals that managed to make their way to the highway were all killed by the army.

Looking at those suicide attacks, Luo Yuan didn't think these animals were controlled by a powerful superior organism.

After about four and a half hours, they finally arrived at Hedong City.

The city, which used to be a leisure destination during its heyday, was now being heavily-guarded. Starting from the highway, the defense construction covered the whole of Hedong City, plus the rural villages nearby. Many vehicles were bustling and hustling at the construction site.

When the cars reached the Hedong City highway entrance, they were stopped. The army was allowed to continue, but the rest of the vehicles were blocked by armed policemen standing by the roadside.

“Welcome to Hedong City. I am Fangxiao, the Central Team Captain of the West District of the Hedong City Police Force. Now, everyone please get out of your cars to go through the necessary registration process and security check!” a policeman was shouting through a loudspeaker.

Luo Yuan’s face darkened as he and Huang Jiahui looked at each other. They had a rifle in their car and if the police checked, they would be caught red-handed.

But apparently, they were not the only ones in possession of contraband. In fact, there were plenty of other people, and soon enough some of them rushed forward.

“Who are you to have us register and go through a security

check?” a car owner yelled angrily as he got out of his car.

“That’s right! If we lost something, where would we look for it?” another car owner shouted.

“All the officials are corrupted! The world had gone to sh*t!”

As many people had been doing the same illegal thing, it would not do any good to punish them all, despite the fact that this was the law. Besides, this group of people was not made up of regular citizens, but rich people who all had friends in the high ranks. As a result, they were much bolder.

“My dear brothers and sisters, please don’t misunderstand us. We will just carry out the standard x-ray security check to prevent the entrance of any contraband that may affect the stability of Hedong City. Weapons such as guns, bows and crossbows must be handed in!” Fangxiao said loudly. He was sweating all over his face. If anything went wrong, he was sure to lose his job.

As soon as he finished speaking, everyone started shouting in outrage. After experiencing the collapse of society and getting attacked by a large group of insects, they had completely lost all faith in the government. Therefore, weapons were the only thing they could rely on to protect themselves.

Several people lost their self-control and went so far as to take out their guns. It looked like the situation was about to get out of control.

Chapter 41: Apart

The policemen were surrounded by a big crowd of refugees from Donghu City. Fang Xiao felt anxious. He knew the first group of people would be tough to handle, and he did not dare make a rush decision. He called to ask his superior for advice, however, the instructions he received were not what he had expected. He cursed silently. He could not change a thing.

He took the loudspeaker and shouted as loud as he could, "My dearest friends, please do not act on your impulses. Regardless of the rules and regulations you used to follow in Donghu City, it's illegal to own a gun here. All guns must be surrendered when you enter Hedong City. However, you can still keep your knives and other weapons respectively."

He suddenly stopped shouting for a few seconds and glanced across the crowd before concluding, "If you can't accept these conditions, we will not allow you to enter Hedong City!"

The crowd stopped and gradually calmed down. As history had proved, citizens would never oppose government officials if they could avoid any unnecessary punishment. Since the police were willing to compromise, the foreigners were willing to tolerate their culture and rules as well.

"All those weapons came from the police! It's difficult for me to believe every citizen in Hedong City follows the rules," a guy beside Luo Yuan said sarcastically while he crossed his arms in front of his chest.

“Can’t you see? If we don’t surrender our weapons, how will they be able to sell them again? Forget it, I’ll just see it as paying tax,” another guy commented, joining the conversation for fun.

Huang Jiahui was getting more and more upset as she continued to listen. She had not confirmed whether this was the truth, but she did believe that it was.

“Inspection is starting! Please return to your cars, remain calm and do not act on your impulses. I repeat, please remain calm...,” Fang Xiao kept shouting. On his signal, a group of policemen started going around with a small X-ray machine.

“Go back to your seat and give me the rifle and the gun,” Luo Yuan told Huang Jiahui, pulling her arm.

She shook his hand off and said, “No way! Why do we need to surrender?”

Luo Yuan sounded annoyed as he said, “Why? Why won’t you just surrender the weapons? I’m not going to risk my life for you.”

Huang Jiahui knew she had pissed him off and she reluctantly walked back to the car. She handed him the rifle and the gun, and then returned to the passenger seat that she shared with Wang Shi Shi.

Wang Shi Shi felt anxious as she saw both of them remain silent. She then asked carefully, "Sister Huang, I remember you telling me

that you were a cop. Every policeman has a gun, so it should be fine for us to keep one, right?"

Huang Jiahui still looked upset. "I'm no longer a cop," she said. Suddenly, she recalled something and added, "Oh yeah! My file is still in the Public Security Bureau. It hasn't been removed, so that means I'm still a cop!"

Luo Yuan asked, "So? That would only be useful if you still wanted to be a cop."

Huang Jiahui felt slightly relieved that Luo Yuan was willing to talk to her again, but she was still upset. "Why not?" she said. "There are whole armies guarding Hedong City. I think it's safer here. Besides, being a cop is better than working anywhere else. The benefits are good!"

"Alright, it's up to you." Luo Yuan did not want to continue that conversation. Everyone had their own path to follow and they needed to take full responsibility for it.

Huang Jiahui was upset and intentionally said, "Don't worry, I'll take care of you when I go back to working for the police." She thought Luo Yuan would say something sarcastic again. Surprisingly, he did not.

"Just take good care of yourself," he said. "Hedong City is not as safe as it used to be. Oh right! Would you like to contact your husband and daughter? They are both here, right?" Luo Yuan asked considerately.

Huang Jiahui hesitated. She did not want to talk to her husband because they did not love each other anymore. However, she decided to call when she thought of her daughter, who was still staying with him.

“Hi, who is this?” A low pitch voice came from the other end.

Huang Jiahui took a deep breath and answered, “It’s me, Huang Jiahui. I’m calling from a friend’s phone. Where are you? I’m in Hedong City. I called you earlier but it didn’t go through. There are still a few colleagues of mine in Donghu City. I’ll check with them and arrange for you to come over with the second group of citizens.”

Her husband said, “It’s okay, I’m in Hedong City now.”

“Is our daughter with you?” Huang Jiahui asked coldly.

“Does that mean you’re at the highway junction? Where are you now? I’m coming over,” his voice became slightly agitated.

Huang Jiahui looked at Luo Yuan for a while, but he was not paying attention to the conversation. She hesitated before she said, “Alright. Please bring our daughter along. I’m inside a Santana 2000 next to a silver Benz.”

About 10 minutes later, they saw a man in a uniform walk towards them holding a little girl in his arms. The girl looked

about five or six years old. Judging by his uniform and the badges on his collar, the man had to be a Squadron Leader. He was also the person who had been on the phone just now. He looked smart and virtuous, but his eyes were very fierce and that made him look violent.

“Mommy! Mommy!” Once the little girl saw Huang Jiahui, she began to wave.

Huang Jiahui teared up from the excitement. She quickly put down Wang Shi Shi and got out of the car. She took the little girl in her arms and said, “Ning Ning! Mommy is here! I missed you so much! How are you? How has your stay with daddy been?” Huang Jiahui asked.

The little girl peeped at her father and replied, “It was great!”

Yu Gaohui noticed Luo Yuan sitting in the driver's seat. He frowned and said, “Jiahui, who is this? Care to introduce us?”

“This is Luo Yuan. He is my friend,” Huang Jiahui replied calmly.

Luo Yuan got out of the car, extended his hand with a smile and said, “Hi. We're just friends, nothing else.” Luo Yuan knew that these types of men were dangerous, especially when they were given authority and power. He didn't have to offend her husband by giving him the wrong impression.

Huang Jiahui was stunned and anxious. The two men stared at each other for a moment. Yu Gaohui suddenly smiled and said, “I want to thank you on behalf of Jiahui. Our family will always remember your help.”

Luo Yuan smiled. He was amazed by the man’s courtesy and good manners.

Yu Gaohui looked at Huang Jiahui as he said, “Jiahui, mom and dad are both in the car. They were so happy to hear from you. Could you please come and see them?” Both of his parents had always been very kind to Huang Jiahui, They treated her as their own daughter. If it were not for them, Huang Jiahui and Yu Gaohui would have gotten divorced way earlier. She hesitated before finally agreeing. She turned around and looked at Luo Yuan while she walked away. As he watched her, Luo Yuan suddenly felt as though he was going to lose her.

Finally, the inspectors reached their car. They confiscated his gun and rifle, and then proceeded to the next car. They did not bother asking where he had gotten them from. Shortly thereafter, everyone was asked to register themselves in a temporarily built iron room.

“Chen Guohua, did you use to own a trading company?” an officer asked while looking at a notebook.

“Yes, sir,” a middle-aged man answered.

“You have accounts at Commercial Bank, Agricultural Bank, and

Donghu City Bank. Your total savings amount to thirty three million, is that right?" the officer asked again.

The middle-aged man blinked before he answered carefully, "Yes, sir."

"How many employees did you have during your peak time?"

The man began to sweat but he answered honestly, "Two hundred!"

"Great! I hope you can build a factory again as soon as possible!" the officer said.

"Build a factory?" The man looked confused.

"A military factory. We will start a bullet manufacturing business tomorrow. I hope you can get everything ready for it," the officer explained.

"But.. but..." the man seemed to want to say something, but he was not given a chance to.

"Next!" the officer shouted without looking at him. The man stood up and left with a miserable expression.

"Don't worry, we will provide all the equipment and send a few experienced technicians to your factory. I hope your company can

produce certified barrel bombs," the officer told him.

"But I was in the real estate industry. I have zero experience in the metal manufacturing industry," the man tried to explain.

"This is not a big issue. Don't worry about it... Next!" the officer said. "What's your name?"

"Luo Yuan," Luo Yuan answered calmly.

The officer checked his notebook and realized his name was not on the list. He frowned and asked Luo Yuan, "Did someone bring you here?"

"Yes," Luo Yuan answered.

"What's your educational background, occupation and working experience?" the officer asked him in one breath.

"I have a single license in International Trade and one year of working experience," Luo Yuan replied.

"Next!"

Chapter 42: Rent

Luo Yuan walked out of the registration office feeling embarrassed. There were several pretty waitresses with long seductive legs standing by the exit. They looked at him for a while before they shifted their gaze away. Luo Yuan smiled and then quickly walked to his car with Wang Shishi, who had been waiting for him outside. He took out his phone and noticed that it was running out of battery. He wanted to call Wang Xianguang. He wanted to see her, but apparently she had used his last bit of battery to call her husband.

Luo Yuan was a bit upset as he put his phone back into his pocket. It seemed that they would catch up another time. Wang Shishi and Luo Yuan waited in the car for an hour, but Huang Jiahui did not return. Luo Yuan did not want to wait any longer. He was sure she would not come back. He started the car engine and drove towards the city center.

Hedong City was different from Donghu City. The whole town was filled with a strange vitality. This was not his first time there, but it was not longer the leisure destination it used to be. There used to be a very crowded commercial shopping street, which now had become a giant industrial area. There were too many different kinds of machines and mechanical noises, and people could imagine how hot it was there even though they could not see the worksite.

He passed several of those worksites along the way. There were not many people on the street, but surprisingly that did not make them feel anxious or insecure. They just felt like this was the quiet before the storm. He entered a shop and an attendant came up to

welcome him. "My name is Chen Baoqiang. Would you like to rent or buy a house?" the attendant asked.

He offered Luo Yuan a cup of tea, but he declined. "I'd like to rent a house with two rooms and a living room. Do you have anything like that?" Luo Yuan asked.

"Sure we do. Our agency has data on more than twenty units. Would you like to see the properties now?" Chen Baoqiang seemed quite pushy and desperate. Luo Yuan nodded in agreement.

"Alright, could you wait for a moment?" Chen Baoqiang looked excited. He grabbed a contract from the office and started to lock the place down.

"What's wrong? Are you the only employee working here?" Luo Yuan felt strange watching the agent lock the entire office.

"Hehe, that's embarrassing. I'm actually the owner of the agency," he said as he smiled. "You know how it is now. We used to have many employees, but they've all been sent home. We're not making a lot of sales. There are lots of vacant units. I'm barely earning enough to meet my daily needs."

Luo Yuan seemed to sympathize with him. "Oh, is there any electricity in the residential area?"

"Are you new here? We used to have electricity, but it was cut five days ago," Chen Baoqiang said as shook his head. He then went

on to explain, "All small residential areas are the same. The industrial area is the number one priority for power supply."

"There is a nuclear power plant at Hedong Bay, right beside Hedong city. How come there is no electricity?" Luo Yuan asked suspiciously. The nuclear power plant at Hedong Bay had been the first power plant in Jiangnan Province when Luo Yuan had paid his first visit there.

"It's just a small one, it can't generate enough power. It definitely can't produce enough power for the whole of Hedong City. Part of the power supply is produced from hydroelectricity from The Three Gorges Dam. But I guess something must be wrong with the dam as there has been no electricity lately."

Luo Yuan knew that if there was something wrong with The Three Gorges Dam, it could have a destructive impact on the whole city. In other words, the most developed and sophisticated province in China would have no electricity for its daily operations. He felt anxious. If the largest power station in China was not functioning properly, then other power plants could be affected as well. Anyway, this was all just speculating. He stopped thinking about it right away.

Chen Baoqiang did not have a car, so Wang Shishi had to sit on Luo Yuan's lap again. Chen Baoqiang looked at Wang Shishi, who was being shy, and asked, "Is this your sister? She's beautiful!"

After consuming blue ranked meats for a few days, Wang Shishi looked more energetic and pretty than ever. "Yes," Luo Yuan responded before he asked, "How much longer to the house?"

Chen Baoqiang was very observant and he knew that he had crossed a line. He stopped talking about Wang Shishi and told Luo Yuan, "Just take a turn at the end of this road."

After a few more minutes of driving, they entered a middle class residential area. Suddenly, they heard a gunshot. Apparently, it was the sound of a machine gun. Luo Yuan got shocked and stepped on the brakes. Chen Baoqiang got out of the car and looked up at the sky. When he had calmed down, he said, "Don't worry, someone was trying to get the birds. They missed. You'll get used to it eventually."

Luo Yuan opened the window to check and saw a few birds flying in the distance. All he could see was several tiny dots. He was worried. He felt that the area wasn't that safe.

Luo Yuan checked out the house, which was located on the third floor of the building. It was a safe height, and the renovation was relatively decent. However, he found the electrical appliances wasteful since they were not going to be able to use them. He went to the kitchen and was surprised to discover that there were a gas and water supply. After going through a terrible time in Donghu City, he would be contented as long as he found a safe place with a water and gas supply to stay. Unfortunately, some issues came up when they were about to sign the contract. "Do you only accept food stamps here?" Luo Yuan asked.

Chen Baoqiang explained, "Our money is depreciating every day. Hardly anybody uses it now. I suggest that you exchange it for food stamps at the bank as soon as possible. Otherwise, it will be very

difficult for you to make any purchases."

Luo Yuan frowned. He had not expect to have to deal with food stamps. He had only heard some old folks talking about it. He asked, "What's the current exchange rate between money and food stamps?"

"Yesterday it was CNY23 for 500 grams worth of food stamps, but I think it will rise even more soon. Of course, you can also trade your food to get food stamps as well," Chen Baoqiang suggested as he had noticed that they had lots of food in the trunk.

Luo Yuan did not want to pay using the food he had. He tried to come up with a solution, and finally said, "How about this. I'll pay you with money now, taking into account the current exchange rate, and perhaps you could exchange it at the bank? I really can't make it to the bank today."

"If you are comfortable with it, why not?" Chen Baoqiang said happily. "Let me calculate the total amount payable. It's CNY 14,000 for six months of rental plus a one-month deposit."

That was a good deal considering the rate he got would have been really low even before this chaos. Nobody could suppress the real estate prices during peaceful times, but they fell drastically during hard times. Luo Yuan had expected this, so he wasn't surprised. He had withdrawn a lot of money from his bank account before the chaos, and he still had about CNY 100,000 in savings in his bank account, which would be more than enough to pay the bills.

Luo Yuan sat down on the couch after Chen Baoqiang left. He felt relaxed and he enjoyed the quiet. “What a good feeling!” After all, no one liked a hazardous life when it might lead to their own death. After resting for a while, he stood up and asked Wang Shishi, “Which room do you want?”

She had looked depressed ever since Huang Jiahui had left them. “I’ll just take the smaller room on the left,” she said. After a while, she asked, “Is Sister Huang really not coming back? What if she is waiting for us there?”

Luo Yuan remained silent. When she noticed his expression, Wang Shishi stopped asking.

After a while, Luo Yuan started moving all their belongings from the car into the house. Wang Shishi tried to help, but Luo Yuan pushed her away. He was feeling frustrated. When he was finished, he took a shower, but he still felt empty. He put on his clothes, took out a crumpled pack of cigarettes and lit one up.

After a while, he put down the cigarette and told Wang Shishi, “You stay here. I’m going out for a bit.”

He rushed out of the house before she could respond. He got into the car and revved up the accelerator until it produced a black cloud of exhaust smoke. He drove towards the junction of the residential area. He didn’t know what he was doing. Perhaps he was trying to figure something out.

He sped up from time to time. The sun was going down and it

was almost evening. The refugee registration had already ended and after such long hours of work, the place seemed deserted. Even the iron shelves that had been built especially for the registration were gone. Luo Yuan looked around the place and felt disappointed. However, just as he was about to drive off, he noticed someone squatting down in the distance. He frowned and pushed on the accelerator. The Santana 2000 produced a loud noise. It was a really old car.

As the car stopped, Luo Yuan shouted out the window, “Stop squatting there and just get in!”

Huang Jiahui looked shocked as she raised her teary eyes. She was shivering and she seemed agitated. She felt happy and mad at the same time. “Why are you here?”

“It’s late already. Wang Shishi and I are waiting for you to prepare dinner. Hurry up!” Luo Yuan replied.

It was hard for Huang Jiahui to be touched by that. What Luo Yuan had just said simply drove away any sentimental feeling she might be having. She went up to the driver’s window and grabbed his shirt. “Do you know how many hours I’ve been waiting here? Do you know how hopeless I’ve felt? I’ve lost my daughter! I’ve lost everything! I’m not leaving again, even if you push me away! You’re such a jerk!”

Luo Yuan looked at her with imaginary question marks above his head. Huang Jiahui kissed him square on the lips.

Chapter 43: Expertise

Luo Yuan could not pass up a good piece of meat when it was close enough to taste. He remained still for a moment, and then began to move aggressively. He could not control his desire anymore. In the end, he pulled Huang Jiahui into the car, where their actions got even more aggressive. However, Huang Jiahui stopped him at the critical moment and told him that Wang Shi Shi was waiting for her at home. Besides, it was very dangerous for them to behave like this in a forest. Although her excuses were not convincing enough, Luo Yuan chose to be a gentleman and stopped. He withdrew his wet hand from her panties.

They didn't have to rush as they would get to spend more time together at night. However, he had forgotten that women were emotional creatures. He had also underestimated Huang Jiahui's rationality when she calmed herself down. After dinner, Luo Yuan tried to hint to Huang Jiahui a couple of times that he was still excited from their earlier encounter. However, Huang Jiahui pretended that nothing had happened before and entered the room along with Wang Shi Shi.

Luo Yuan watched her shut the door. The poor guy wanted to call Huang Jiahui but in the end he stopped himself and controlled his desire for sex. He went back to his room feeling hopeless. He comforted himself by thinking that they would get another chance in the future. He sighed and then concentrated on improving his knife skills. People tended to be more productive when they were not in love. Luo Yuan had managed to upgrade his knife skill to Level 15 by 11 p.m., after just a few hours of training. He could have advanced to Level 20 if he had assigned the 5 technique points to his knife skills.

Although he knew it would better to add the technique points at a later stage, he decided to assign the 5 points to his knife skill after all. He could not resist the urge. Besides, he also wanted to know what would happen when his skill reached Level 20. He went ahead and assigned all 5 points to his knife skill. Suddenly, a wave of knowledge filled him and he felt something gush into his brain, making him feel a little dizzy.

A dark red cockroach was hiding beneath the bed, trying to get some food, when it suddenly got shocked. Its antennas started moving vigorously and it quickly crawled towards the door. However, it was only halfway there when it stopped. Its body had hardened and it could not move anymore. Luo Yuan's energy had even penetrated the wall and spread into Huang Jiahui's room. The two of them were sleeping, but they had difficulty breathing and were sweating profusely as if they were having a horrible nightmare.

The energy faded with time and Luo Yuan's eyes got clearer, two light beams appearing at the last moment before disappearing again. "Beep! Sensory perception +1!" He had recovered in a second, which made him really excited. He wanted to scream, but he did not. He was a considerate neighbor after all. He had not expected a sensory perception upgrade when he had assigned the technique points to the knife skill.

He closed his eyes slowly and realized that the range of his sensory perception had improved. He could now detect changes within a 10-meter radius from where he stood. He could even sense Huang Jiahui and Wang Shi Shi, who were sleeping next door. Unfortunately, he could only see their shadows and not any other

body details. Anyway, that wasn't that important. His sensory perception used to be weak, however, after the upgrade, he could tell the difference even with the naked eye.

From certain aspects, sensory perception provided an overall control as well as motion detection. The eyes of the frog were a very good example. A frog's sensory perception focused on motion instead of on inanimate objects. His attention was drawn by moving objects, such as someone moving their hands or talking, or something being blown away by the wind. It was a very special power, as well as a useful technique.

While one could say that eyesight and sensory perception were similar, the two of them had entirely different functions. They did not affect each other but they did work together. Luo Yuan even suspected that this was a natural power human beings had acquired through evolution. From now onwards, no human or animal could get closer than 10 meters to him.

For example, when Luo Yuan suddenly moved, his knife shone in the dark and the cockroach that had been trying to escape was killed before it had even managed to move a meter. Strangely, the tile under the cockroach looked perfectly fine. Luo Yuan had only used this technique when he had dissected the big snake. He had been wanting to concentrate and gather his energy for quite a while. Now though, it would be too easy for him. Of course, he would need to practice more to familiarize himself with this new skill.

He opened up the properties panel and noted that some changes had been made. When the knife skill had gotten upgraded to Level

20, there had been some changes then too. For instance, his knife skill had changed to “Knife Expertise: 0”.

Based on the information on his mind, he guessed that when the knife skill reached an expert level, it would be different than the normal knife skill. It had already begun to involve a power that was seemingly the most useless one in the properties panel, and that was “Determination”. Previously, Luo Yuan had assumed that “Determination” was only meant to help him remain calm regardless of what situation he encountered. Basically, he thought his 13-point Determination would be more than enough. However, he had not expected it to turn out to be so important for the knife skill.

While he played with his knife, he wondered what the difference between the normal knife skill and knife expertise was, how powerful it would be, and whether it could be used to kill blue rank creatures. He closed his eyes and felt the magical changes. One minute later, he reopened them and took several deep breaths. Then he closed them again. After 10 minutes, he got frustrated and scratched his head.

Half an hour later, he looked out the window and realized that it was almost dawn. The night had moved on from the earlier excitement to the present excitement, and finally given way to depression. He realized that he could not achieve a state in which he would have no desires. Even if he closed his eyes, there were too many things and ideas inside his head, and that made him feel extremely frustrated. The most important thing was his sensory perception, which would allow him to detect almost anything. He was distracted and the inside of his head was a mess even when he closed his eyes. He sat down at the edge of his bed helplessly. He

rubbed his eyes and a few minutes later he felt calmer.

This wasn't about talent. He was an adult and he had to be more mature after getting a shower of knowledge and information. Besides, this was the first time he had tried to explore this technique. It was impossible for him to be totally aware even if he had all the knowledge he needed. He had a few ways to achieve that, though. Luo Yuan recalled that meditation associated with yoga and the monks could help calm down a person's mind. Too bad he had no internet connection, or he could have checked that online.

Chapter 44: Aversion

Luo Yuan felt very energetic despite the fact that he had not slept the entire night. After breakfast, he took some money with him and set out to explore the district. Soon enough, he had found the location of every single food market in the district. There was always a big crowd inside food markets, but the layout was arranged to fit all the stalls perfectly. Luo Yuan entered the market to check it out, and he discovered that there was a purchasing limit there just like in Donghu City. However, the purchasing limit was a lot higher than the one in Donghu City. Plus, identity cards were not required and everyone could purchase up to 25 kilos of food.

Apparently, there was no shortage of food in Hedong City, which was probably due to certain policies that had been established to provide the capital with a large quantity of food supplies. Of course, the main reason was the fact that the largest granary of the military base in the province was located in the city. The whole market was brimming with the awful smell of food packaging. Some of the dried food had been in storage for more than 10 years. Previously, all this food had been used to produce fodder, but now it had become the kind of food that everyone struggled to get their hands on. Five hundred grams of food stamps were equivalent to five hundred grams of food, and the price of fresh food was 1.5 times higher than the price of canned food.

According to the information on the posters inside the food market, this amount of food could sustain three million people for a year. Of course, there was the possibility that the government-issued posters were not telling the truth. However, in the worst case scenario, it would still be possible to sustain three million people for half a year. Luo Yuan was surprised to see there was even a stall selling maize. He was amazed by the size of the fresh

corn, which was quite different because it had mutated. Each corncob was about 65cm long and each corn kernel was just as big. It smelled so good it made people drool. However, there were more people looking at it than actually buying it.

Luo Yuan squeezed through the crowd to check the price on it. He was shocked. One had to pay 2,500 grams of food stamps for 500 grams of corn, and it was mandatory to buy a whole corncob. Each corncob weighed about 3 kilos, which was equivalent to 15 kilos of dry food. Daily food expenses already cut away a big portion of the average citizen income. No one could afford to buy such expensive corn. Apparently, this kind of corn was new to the market and most people questioned its selling price as they thought it should not be that high. It didn't make any sense considering corn was easy to plant, especially during that period of time when it was growing taller and wasn't affected by weeds anymore. Most people actually thought maize would soon replace paddies and become the main food source.

In the end, the official operations manager had gotten so annoyed by the crowd's questions that he said, "Indeed, corn stalks grow very quickly and can grow up to three or four meters tall. Maize is also the only plant that can grow in almost any type of soil. However, what you aren't aware of is its low pollination and fertilization probability. A corn plant can only grow one corncob and most of them don't even succeed at that. Anyway, this is just the first batch of corn. The scientists in the Ministry of Agriculture are trying to modify the seed, and the price will go down when the quantity increases."

After listening to what the manager had said, Luo Yuan realized that he had not seen any plant bearing fruit or flowers ever since

the mutation had begun.

Survival and reproduction were related to genes and there used to be no conflict between the two in the past as reproduction was a process necessary for survival. However, all living things were undergoing evolution and every single species had to find a way to survive. In order to obtain a competitive advantage, they had to sacrifice a lot of energy and put on hold the fertilization or pollination process. Similarly, when a new employee entered a very competitive company, the first thing that came to mind was how to survive and remain in the company. Only after they had achieved that, did anyone start to think about a promotion or a raise.

When he left, Luo Yuan walked to a second wet market about 10 meters away from the first one. Vegetables were the core products there. The prices were quite affordable and the sizes relatively big. There were many vegetables which were about 4 kilos in weight, but those with intricate small netted veins on the leaves did not taste good and were difficult to swallow. The quantity of the meat was relatively smaller. There was mutated pork, chicken, duck and a few other animals. Luo Yuan secretly identified the different kinds of meat and discovered that all of them were white ranked meat. None of them was light blue. All kinds of meat were very expensive, costing around 3000 grams of food stamps for 500 grams.

He actually wanted to buy some, but he could only walk around as he did not have any food stamps. He walked out of the market and went straight to the bank. It would be tough to live in Hedong City without any food stamps, but Luo Yuan did not plan on exchanging all his money for them. He realized that all food

stamps there were being issued by Hedong City and could not be used in other places. Therefore, even if his money was depreciating, that was still better than what would happen if some kind of tragedy befell Hedong City and caused all food stamps to become worthless. In the end, he exchanged 1000 kilos of food stamps for CNY 46,000. Now he had less than CNY 80,000 left in his bank account.

He thought the food stamps plus the food he had stored up should be enough to sustain them for a long period of time. There was some kind of commotion when Luo Yuan walked out of the bank. There was a big group of people outside who looked like refugees. As they walked in his direction, he noticed that there were several blood stains on their shirts. A few of them looked extremely depressed and teary-eyed while the rest looked anxious and grateful.

"Who are those people?" Luo Yuan asked a middle-aged man who seemed to be watching them too.

"They are refugees from Donghu City," the middle-aged man replied, looking disgusted. Apparently, he was not happy as he went on, "Seems like they got attacked on the highway and some of them died."

"This is just the second batch. I heard there will be a third and fourth one coming. I can't imagine what life will be like in the coming days," a guy in spectacles who looked like a university student joined the conversation.

"I think they really shouldn't help them. There are so many

people in the province. Is the government going to move all of them to Hedong City?" a woman said as she stared at the refugees.

Luo Yuan could understand their concern. It was like a poor suffering family hearing that there would be several strangers coming to their house to stay and eat for free for an unknown period of time. It was normal for them to feel appalled and insecure. However, even though Luo Yuan understood how they felt, he was still quite mad to hear them say that they wanted the refugees to die. After all, he was also a refugee from Donghu City.

"I'm also a Donghu City citizen!" Luo Yuan said, glaring at the people around him. Since his knife skill was at expert level, he looked even scarier. That made things worse as he was not able to fully control and master his emotions. A few people nearby looked very pale while others looked extremely frightened. One of them, who had a heart condition, touched his chest and fell to the ground.

The onlookers shouted, "Murder! Help! Help!"

"Help! Officer! Someone has been killed here!"

"Catch him!"

Some people responded quickly by starting to shout cruel words, but no one dared try to catch him. Luo Yuan was stunned. He had not expected that to happen. A few security guards were made aware of the incident, but they seemed hesitant to check it out. Luo Yuan quickly squeezed into the crowd to avoid getting into trouble.

He managed to escape in less than a minute, and he headed straight home. He was worried that he might get arrested. When he got home and entered the living room, he found some fresh meat and vegetables on the table along with a big cob of corn.

"You're back!" Huang Jiahui had heard him and immediately come out of the kitchen wearing an apron.

"Did you buy these?" Luo Yuan asked while he pointed at the groceries on the table.

"Of course I did!" Huang Jiahui replied.

"I meant, how come you still have money? I totally forgot that you have a bank card. By the way, how much money do you have left?" Luo Yuan asked as he smiled awkwardly.

"My account still has about 1.7 million. I just withdrew 100,000 to exchange it for food stamps. Why?" Huang Jiahui asked him.

Luo Yuan was quite surprised. He had not expected Huang Jiahui to have so much in savings. However, when he thought about the chaotic situation earlier, he said, "I think it might be better for you to withdraw all your money from the bank. I'm afraid you might no longer be able to withdraw it in the near future."

Huang Jiahui seemed worried by this possibility. She frowned and said, "Withdrawing money doesn't seem safe either. Money depreciates faster than gold and antiques. Maybe we can still

exchange money for gold at the bank."

Huang Jiahui was more knowledgeable than Luo Yuan, who was actually quite young compared to her. She had immediately come up with a solution to preserve her money's value.

"Shall we go out? It's still early for breakfast," Huang Jiahui said as she lingered around the house.

"Maybe another day. I got into some trouble earlier and I don't think it's safe for me to go out yet."

Luo Yuan smiled awkwardly again as he realized he had crossed the line outside the bank earlier. He doubted the guy could have survived his chest pain.

Chapter 45: Foundation

Huang Jiahui asked him what had happened. Luo Yuan thought he should explain to her, so he told her the whole story. Huang Jiahui got angry when he mentioned how the citizens in Hedong City had treated the people from Donghu City.

“Do they even have the right to complain? The citizens from Donghu City would not have been in this state if the army had protected them. All these people are relying on the state army and the dry food that’s supposed go to the survivors! And now they’re trying to bully us and make it look like they’re being charitable?”

That was what the average citizen from Donghu City was going to think.

The conflict between Hedong City and Donghu City was not something new. Their economies were relatively similar and their GDPs were also very close. However, the difference between the two cities was that Hedong City acted as the administrative capital of a province, where most of the important ministry and government offices were located. On the other hand, Donghu City was just an average city with an administrative division somewhere between a province and a county. This fact caused the citizens of both cities several dilemmas. Citizens in Donghu City were jealous of the people in Hedong City, but sometimes they also looked down on them because the citizens in Hedong City were not very friendly towards people from Donghu City.

As a citizen of Donghu city, Luo Yuan agreed with what Huang Jiahui had just said, but he was also worried. He frowned and said

seriously, “I think that’s enough for now. Let’s not talk about it anymore. There are too many people speaking nonsense. It’s best that we keep this between us so we can avoid any unnecessary arguments. Anyway, this is Hedong City, so we should try to blend in and compromise every once in a while.”

Huang Jiahui answered, “I’m not stupid. I just won’t say it publicly.”

“Good for you then. I have a feeling that this chaos will last for quite a while. It’s best not to get involved.” Luo Yuan realized he had been back for quite a while already before he asked, “Where’s Shishi?”

“She went down to play,” Huang Jiahui said.

Suddenly, he got an idea and slowly walked towards Huang Jiahui with a sly grin on his face. Huang Jiahui did not know what his intentions were, so she got panicked. “What? What are you doing?” she asked.

“Someone has a very short memory, huh? Don’t you think you owe me an explanation about yesterday?” Luo Yuan said in a flirty tone. He felt upset when he thought about her innocent act the previous day.

“What kind of an explanation do I owe you? I have no idea what you’re talking about,” Huang Jiahui lied again as her cheeks blushed.

She immediately turned around and tried to leave. Just as she was about to take her first step though, she felt a strong big arm catch her. Her entire body was turned around, and her face was suddenly extremely close to Luo Yuan's. Huang Jiahui felt flustered. Her heart beat very fast.

“What do you want? Can we talk about it later?” she asked.

“Finally, you admit it. But how can I trust you again when I was cheated just last night?” Luo Yuan said flirtily. He did not wait for her to answer. He just lowered his head and kissed her juicy lips.

Huang Jiahui whimpered as she struggled to get free. She clenched her jaw and tried to punch him while her whole body shook. However, her resistance only lasted for a few seconds before their tongues began to chase after one another. She felt really confused. She had been staying apart from her husband for a few years and had been abstaining the whole time. Her body was very sensitive, but she was beginning to feel horny as Luo Yuan seduced her. In the end, she just hugged him and started kissing him desperately. They were both getting more and more excited. Luo Yuan pushed her against the wall and locked her in his arms. He then took off her T-shirt and bra, and dropped them both on the floor.

Luo Yuan buried his head in her naked chest while he tried to pull down her jeans with one hand.

“Wait! Not here!” Huang Jiahui gasped. Her hands though were still wrapped around his head, pulling him closer to her chest. Soon, her panties had dropped to her ankles. “Luo Yuan, you’re a

jerk! Are you listening to me? Ohhh.....” She did not manage to finish her sentence. Instead, she moaned, driven crazy by her orgasm.

Huang Jiahui’s body was hot. There was no fat on her thighs or her waist, her breasts were smooth and soft, and her round buttocks made her bum look like a ripe cherry. Luo Yuan was aroused by what he saw and touched. He turned her around and pressed her against the wall so she could hold onto it for support.

Luo Yuan moved his mouth close to her ear and gasped, "I'm going inside now."

Then he squeezed into her before she could respond.

Huang Jiahui felt like she was losing her mind. Her eyes had turned blurry, and she did not even know what was going on. Luo Yuan took a deep breath, amazed by the strong stimulation of his penetration.

“Wait. Wang Shi Shi is coming back."

"Ahhhh!" Huang Jiahui moaned in a very high pitch, becoming slightly conscious of the sudden pain of a foreign object penetrating her body. "I don't care, nothing in life is a coincidence."

Although she felt a little insecure, she did not want to stop, especially considering Luo Yuan was moving at a speed that she

was quite enjoying. She covered her mouth so she would not moan out loud. Luo Yuan found that rather sexy and seductive. Her face was rosy and hot, and her body became weaker as her hands shook while she tried to hold on to the wall. If Luo Yuan had not been holding her, she would have fallen on the floor.

Both of them were gasping as the living room filled with the smell of sex. Suddenly, they heard the sound of footsteps followed by a key being inserted into the keyhole. Both their bodies tensed up.

“Oh no! That’s Wang Shi Shi!”

The strong stimulation and feeling of shame made her face turn red as her entire body shook involuntarily. Her vagina began to contract, bringing the two of them to the peak of orgasm. She moaned and slid down onto the floor. Luo Yuan followed her movement as he struggled to stay standing.

Wang Shi Shi had not entered the house as she seemed to have heard the noise. Huang Jiahui felt relieved as she stared at Luo Yuan angrily for a second. She was confused, mad and shy at the same time. She did not know how she would have explained this to Wang Shi Shi. She quickly picked up her clothes, rushed back to her own room and slammed the door. Luo Yuan just smiled. He did not know how else to respond.

He put on his clothes and after a few minutes yelled, “Come in!”

Wang Shi Shi entered the house with rosy cheeks, looking like

she was the one who had done something naughty. She peeped at Luo Yuan and suddenly said, “Brother Luo!”

Luo Yuan was stunned. He did not know what to say.

Huang Jiahui tried to appear calm when she came out of her room. She stared at Luo Yuan again and lifted the groceries off the table while she said, “Shishi, come help me wash the vegetables.”

“Alright,” Wang Shishi responded. She looked at the puddle of sweat at the scene curiously before she followed Huang Jiahui into the kitchen.

There were many refugees from Donghu City entering Hedong City in the following days, which caused some serious turmoil. Crimes like fighting, robbery, and rape were so common in the city, they were as frequent people breathing. Even the area where Luo Yuan was staying experienced lots of fighting incidents, the worst fight causing more than ten people to die and ten to get injured. Both parties had owned weapons such as knives and guns.

There were several times when Luo Yuan had almost gotten into a fight himself, but he had tried really hard to remain calm. Soldiers had been sent to Hedong City and the government had implemented quite a few new policies in order to control the situation. There were marketing trucks with loudspeakers driving around the city for about ten days. Job vacancy posters were plastered everywhere in an effort to reduce the conflict between the two cities, as well as to make full use of the surplus of manpower.

People in Hedong City had obtained a huge amount of resources and equipment from Donghu City, and all of it was used to set up factories. Several factories were built in a short period of time under the governor's centralization system. The government wanted to get advantage of the many abandoned buildings left by the chaos. There was another big project running at the same time, which aimed at converting the biggest national park of Hedong City into a giant worksite. The forest had been burnt a few months ago and Pingyue Lake had also been dried out in just ten days of big scale construction.

There were many construction trucks and heavy vehicles lining up to enter the worksite every day, causing serious noise pollution. Luo Yuan sneaked into the worksite to check it out and realized that the whole site was actually a huge pit. There were countless one-meter diameter 10-meter long iron pillars being inserted into the ground. The whole worksite had a 10-meter deep surface area of 10 square kilometers. He had no idea what those people were trying to build. He wanted to continue his investigation, but he had to stop. The worksite was guarded heavily by wire fences and soldiers.

Chapter 46: Into The Wild

Truthfully, things were no safer in Hedong City.

Every few days, machine guns and fighter jets could be heard firing all over town. The city's defensive measures might have guarded it well against ground attacks, but they were certainly no good against high-speed birds and flying insects. If one could get used to the flying invaders and explosive shoot-downs though, then everything else would seem more or less normal to them.

Since the beginning of time, humans have always been able to adapt easily. From natural disasters to world wars, it should come as no surprise that people would get used to hearing gunfire and bombs explode.

Luo Yuan sat on his bed with his legs crossed and his eyes closed, taking deep breaths in order to relax. He exhaled.

“Oh, hurry up and massage my legs. They're numb already!” he told Huang Jiahui suddenly, breaking the short-lived tranquility.

“Why are you always like this? Why can't I get some sleep?” she said as she turned her back to him.

They discreetly made love several times and were still continuing to do so.

“There's not much time left, it's almost daybreak!” he joked as he

lay next to her, wrapping her up in his warm embrace. He gently slid his hands under her shirt and caressed her tender breasts. He held them in his hands and rhythmically squeezed them, fondling her hard nipples with his forefingers.

He felt the tension leave her body as she gasped with desire. “Didn’t you have enough last night?” she said as she bit her lower lip.

“But that was last night, it’s morning now,” he whispered in her ear as he breathed in the scent of her body.

“Stop fooling around! Wang Shishi will be waking up soon. We don’t want her to hear us,” she said as she grabbed hold of his hands. “I’m not as shameless as you are.”

Luo Yuan laughed and hesitated. He was thinking back to the night before when he had realized that Wang Shishi had been eavesdropping through the door. He had kept quiet about it because it had aroused him further to know that they were being watched. He had thrust harder into Huang Jiahui, and she’d moaned and arched her back ecstatically as he’d come inside of her.

He snapped out of his thoughts. He knew how wrong it was. “Alright, later at night then!”

“You savage!” she exclaimed before she went back to sleep.

He frowned as he waited for the numbness in his legs to go away. When it did, he got up and got dressed.

Meditating was actually quite effortless. All one had to do was remain still and quiet. Crossing one's legs was optional, but clearing one's mind was a must. As a matter of fact, the position of a person's body was hardly the most important factor in meditation. It didn't matter if you were lying down or standing up. The choreography only instructed someone to cross their legs and sit still, all as a mental exercise to prompt and facilitate the state of a clear mind.

Luo Yuan preferred to lie down, as that made it easier for him to fall asleep and ignore the numbness in his legs. No one could really tell if meditation was good or bad, but if it helped clear the tangle of a troubled mind and calm the heart, that was all that mattered. If only mastering the art of the sword was just as easy.

Luo Yuan practiced his swordsmanship for an hour while the girls had their beauty sleep. After breakfast, he left almost immediately for the market. He sat by the market's entrance holding a dark owl feather and a dated newspaper with the words "BUYING AT ANY PRICE" written on it in chalk.

Luo Yuan's initial experiment with the dark owl feather had not turned out so well. He had wanted to see what the results would be if he merged the properties of the feather with his sword or bullet proof vest, but unfortunately the feather had vanished into thin air.

"Merging Failed"

Had he not split the feather into tiny pieces before the experiment, it might not have been just the feather that would have been destroyed. His sword might have broken in the process as well, and that was something his poor heart wouldn't have been able to bear.

He tried again, and this time he was more cautious. He cut a small scale off his vest and attempted to merge it with another piece of feather, but it was to no avail. Both materials were destroyed in the process. Luo Yuan thought that it would be a waste to simply dispose of the feathers, so he decided to experiment with other materials. He thought maybe blue rank materials were not meant to be merged together through alchemy.

He discovered that the dark owl feather could be combined effortlessly with everyday items like a simple kitchen knife. It didn't just improve the material properties, but also slightly increased their speed, a fact that surprised Luo Yuan. The rarity level, however, was limited to a basic white since the amount of feathers he used in the combination was limited. It did surprise Huang Jiahui how smoothly he was able to wield the kitchen knife that night, though.

Even if all the feathers could be used for was a mere speed improvement, Luo Yuan was still not going to let them go to waste. Pants, shoes, clothes and any other available equipment had to be upgraded. However, he was aware that the rarity of the equipment would remain plain white if he used just a single feather. That was when it hit him – he would need more feathers, a lot more of them.

The marketplace was the most crowded in the morning when civilians habitually went grocery shopping before they headed off to work. The entrance was where the crowd began to form. Luo Yuan didn't have to wait too long for his first curious inquirer to appear.

It was a middle-aged man who asked him, "Why are you looking to buy feathers here at the marketplace? What can you do with them anyway?"

Luo Yuan looked at the man squatting down in front of him. "I'm making bulletproof equipment with it. I'll pay you a good deal if you have any!"

The man nodded as he said, "No doubt the equipment will be sturdy, but you're going to need a lot of feathers just to make a single piece."

"To make something truly bulletproof, I shall need at least three to four layers, so approximately thirty four feathers."

"That much?" the man mumbled.

Luo Yuan laughed. Judging by the man's reaction, he was bound to have some feathers at hand. Otherwise, he wouldn't be asking so many questions.

"I wouldn't be buying them at any price if I didn't need a lot of them."

The man hesitated for a moment. “Well, I have a few at hand, but I’d like to hear how much you’re willing to pay first.”

“If my calculations are correct, a military bulletproof vest would cost a 100-gram rice coupon. How about I pay you a 3-gram rice coupon per feather?”

“That’s way too low! You can’t compare conventional bulletproof equipment to biologically enhanced equipment,” the man said as he shook his head. “Biological equipment might be in limited supply, but I’ve heard that it is much better in all aspects compared to conventional equipment! Three grams is definitely too little. How about a 5-gram rice coupon per feather?”

The two of them bargained for several minutes, as neither wanted to end up on the losing side of the deal. Finally, they reached an agreement, setting the price at a 4.5-gram rice coupon per feather. The middle-aged man was more than delighted to settle at 4.5 and he ran out to bring the feathers. While he waited, Luo Yuan succeeded in making a second deal, so by noon he had bought a total of thirty dark owl feathers. Just as he was about to leave, a man suddenly stopped in front of him.

He was tall and large in built, so big that his presence alone was enough to intimidate someone. He stood there and looked at Luo Yuan, his stern face looking confused.

“Boss Luo? Is that you?”

Luo Yuan looked up at the man. He looked a bit familiar but he couldn't quite recall who it was. Then suddenly he smiled.

“Qian Dakui! Long time no see! When did you get here?”

“I was supposed to be on the third group, but I was detained for a while for starting a fight in Hedong City, so I just got here recently.” He spoke in an obnoxiously loud volume that prompted many looks from the people around them. Most of them would have beaten him if it wasn't for his size.

“Have you got any of these? I'm looking for dark owl feathers.”

“Yeah, I've got some alright. I saw a bird get shot down by one of them machine guns in the outskirts. I'm sure it's these same feathers, but they must be rotten by now. Do you still want them?”

“Yeah, of course! Where can I find them?”

“It's a very dangerous place. I stumbled upon them while I was running for my life! But it shouldn't be a problem for Boss Luo, of course!” he said, bursting into laughter. He knew what Luo Yuan was capable of. He had seen him effortlessly kill an armed man using only his sword.

“Wait a minute. You've been into the wild? I thought the army was guarding the exits,” Luo Yuan said. He was certain that the borders of Hedong City were being heavily guarded by the military.

“Guarding my ass! We do all their dirty work for them! We hunt down the food and then they buy it from us for nothing. They even give us the weapons to do it! Where do you think the city gets its food supply from?”

Luo Yuan knew what Qian Dakui was insinuating. Watching him got Luo Yuan excited about hunting, not to mention that he was also tempted by the idea of successfully casting his own set of blue rank equipment. He wondered how many feathers a single black owl could provide him.

“Alright, I’m in. Just tell me when and where.”

“That’s the spirit! How about tomorrow morning? Let’s meet at the marketplace and I’ll introduce you to my comrades.”

“Sounds like a plan!” Luo Yuan nodded in agreement.

They talked for a little longer, and then left the marketplace without exchanging any contact information.

Chapter 47: New Equipment

Luo Yuan was carrying his groceries in a burlap sack and walking back home when he saw a man and a woman coming out of his apartment. He watched them walk away before he went into the kitchen. After setting the groceries on the table, he asked Huang Jiahui, “Who were those people?”

“You’re back!” she exclaimed as she was finishing mopping the floor. “Oh, they’re members of the community. They just dropped by some documents that we need to fill in. They wanted to discuss re-enrolling children for classes.”

“Classes?” Luo Yuan shook his head in disbelief.

“I don’t want to go to school!” Wang Shishi threw a tantrum, tossing around on the couch in denial. After being with the two of them for so long, she was starting to be more open around them, especially around Luo Yuan.

“So what will you be doing then?” Huang Jiahui countered while she put the groceries away. “Now that the situation has been stabilized, you’ll have to head out into society eventually and you’re gonna need a degree to get a decent job. Besides, learning is not that bad.”

Once Huang Jiahui was out of sight, Wang Shishi rushed stealthily to sit next to Luo Yuan. She wrapped herself around his arm, silently begging him with her puppy eyes.

Luo Yuan took her side, “I think we should wait it out. I mean, there’s no need to rush back into all of this yet. Besides, she’s still young. It wouldn’t make much of a difference if she enrolled a year or two later.”

“THANK YOU, BROTHER LUO! YOU’RE THE BEST!” Wang Shishi screamed while she jumped up and down in joy.

“Okay, fine. It’s none of my business anyway,” Huang Jiahui replied from the kitchen.

Luo Yuan looked at Wang Shishi and they both giggled childishly. Suddenly Wang Shishi blushed, as if she had recalled something.

“Well, I’ve got some stuff to do,” Luo Yuan said as he carried the burlap sack into his room.

As he closed the bedroom door, Luo Yuan was filled with an unexpected feeling of excitement. He quickly unloaded the dark owl feathers onto the study table and rushed to retrieve some clothes from his wardrobe for the experiment. He picked a pair of track pants.

Injuring one’s legs in the wild was a matter of life or death; hence, it was imperative to be equipped with an enhanced pair of pants. He chose a pair of pants first as his upper body would be protected by the bulletproof vest.

He took a deep breath. Holding the pants in one hand and a feather in the other, he began chanting silently while carefully bringing the two items into contact. The feather started to heat up as he finished the incantation. It gradually softened, and then turned into dust once it came into contact with the pants. The process of transfiguration never ceased to amaze him, no matter how often he performed it. He picked up another piece and continued transfiguring the feathers one by one, merging them in one with the track pants.

The colour of the track pants gradually changed from light blue to black, the colour of the dark owl feathers. To measure the changes in the track pants, he cast an evaluation spell after every successful transfiguration. The pants reached a rarity level of light blue after the eighth feather and were later upgraded to a rarity of blue after the twenty-eighth feather.

Despite the fact that he had underestimated the cost required for the transfiguration, Luo Yuan was still very excited by its success – the feathers on the track pants alone had cost him a 200-gram rice coupon. He decided to stop combining the remaining feathers with the track pants. From his experience transfiguring his sword and vest, he had learned that once a piece of equipment had reached a rarity of blue, it was not worth transfiguring any more. Its rarity would remain the same, and there would only be a slight improvement in terms of its properties.

“I’m in no hurry. Besides, if Qian Dakui is really telling the truth, I’ll have plenty more of these feathers to transfigure tomorrow!”

“Materials: Dark Owl Feathers, Nylon”

“Rarity: Blue”

“Defense: 12-15”

“Additional Effects: Speed +3”

“Minimum Requirements: None”

“Evaluation: Agile track pants with enhanced defense against swords and bullets, and improved aerodynamics that reduce wind resistance”

Luo Yuan checked the track pants properties and noticed that despite their rarity of blue, they were still not comparable to his snakeskin bulletproof vest. The vest, while also blue in rarity, had a considerably more prominent advantage. Nevertheless, the enhanced track pants were light and soft, and their fabric had turned into a light-absorbing shade of ebony, which would come in handy during combat. Most importantly, they would enable him to maneuver swiftly without having to fight against the force physics, or more specifically against wind resistance.

Seeing that he had twelve feathers left, Luo Yuan decided to transfigure his military boots as well.

“Agile Military Boots”

“Materials: Dark Owl Feathers, Leather, Rubber”

“Rarity: Light Blue”

“Weight: 0.5 kg”

“Defense: 9-11”

“Additional Effects: Speed +2”

“Minimum Requirements: None”

“Evaluation: An agile pair of military boots with improved aerodynamics that reduce wind resistance”

When Luo Yuan arrived at the market entrance the next morning, Qian Dakui was already there waiting for him. Two other men were with him, one of them a slightly fat and short middle-aged man with a clean complexion and smiling eyes, and the other a lean, tanned man with thin lips. Their armour was in unexpected shades of bright colour, and the car parked beside them was shaped like a loaf of bread.

“Goodness, am I late?” Luo Yuan asked apologetically.

Qian Dakui laughed, “Don’t worry, brother, we just got here. Allow me to introduce you to Yang Dawei and Zhang Cao, both old friends of mine.” He turned to the two men while he pointed at Luo Yuan. “We’ve all been to Chengdu’s Disposal Site, so this man requires no introduction. I’m sure you know Brother Luo?”

The two men looked very alarmed when they saw Luo Yuan. They were just realizing why Qian Dakui had refused to tell them who the surprise new member was. It was the man who had killed Brother Zhou. The news of the incident had only recently began to circulate among their inner circle as they had previously been too busy dealing with the green beetle invasion.

“We’ve heard so much about you. Pleasure to make your acquaintance!” Yang Dawei greeted with a smile.

“Hello, nice to meet you,” Zhang Chao smiled stiffly.

Luo Yuan laughed, “I’m surprised we’ve all been to the Disposal Site. Never too late to make an acquaintance. Don’t call me Brother Luo, though. I’m not worthy of such a title! Just Luo will do.”

The two nervous men sighed in relief, and the ice broke. The party of four hopped inside the vehicle and set out on their excavation. Luo Yuan and Yang Dawei sat in the backseat and talked quite a lot. Apparently, there were lots of people from the Hedong District setting out into the wild, especially refugees from Donghu City. It hadn’t taken long for the people from Donghu City

to join in the hunting arrangement. They had caught up real quick with the locals. Although it was not spoken of, Luo Yuan was certain that there had been many incidents of conflict between the two parties while they hunted. He knew enough to know that he should be more worried about the people from Hedong City.

About an hour and a half later, the car reached the outskirts of the city, where fields of grains and trees as tall as skyscrapers spread as far as the eye could see. Luo Yuan stared out the window and finally recognized what was indeed a cornfield. Despite how densely the field was covered with corn plants, not a single cob of corn could be seen. He thought that maybe they were all covered by the green parts of the plant, but he had never realized how dire the plant production was until this very moment.

The plantation might have been a great defensive measure on its own, but the city had also built outposts within every few corners as an extra measure. Each outpost was occupied by seven or eight fully uniformed soldiers patrolling their designed areas for any potential danger. After driving through the fields and several desolated cities in between, the car finally stopped in front of a heavily guarded Defense Report Centre.

Chapter 48: Petrified

This place is hardly a Defense Report Centre. It's a freaking military camp.

From what Luo Yuan could see, four towers, one hundred meters tall each, had been erected at each corner of the encampment, which was surrounded by porcupine-like iron-spikes. Approximately every ten minutes, a fighter jet would boom across the sky and patrol the area for any potential danger.

It was pretty obvious that the encampment was the city's frontline defense against the monsters – it looked like the surface of the moon, what with all the bomb-made craters in the area. The scent of gunpowder and smoke perfumed the atmosphere, a foreshadowing of danger, a warning that a battle could occur at any given time.

With every routine thundering of the fighter jet, came a noticeable commotion within the woods. No one could be certain if it was the recoiling of the wind, or monsters reacting to the sound of the fighter jet in terror. Looking beyond the horizon, Luo Yuan could not help but dread a potential monster stampede.

“The city's got about ten of these frontline defense encampments. This is the nearest one,” Qian Dakui said aloud, unfazed by the sight. “Alright, man, let's get some technical stuff taken care of and then go rent ourselves some weapons!”

Luo Yuan snapped out of his reverie. “They've got all kinds of

weapons?”

“Well, as long as you can carry them, of course! And there are plenty of provision coupons to spare!” Yang Dawei said while he pretended to count invisible money with his hands. “Pistols, shotguns, machine guns, hand grenades... You name it, they’ve got it! They know that you have to have a death wish to head out there unarmed.”

They got out of the car and Qian Dakui opened the trunk, revealing an assortment of melee weapons. With a businesslike motion, Zhao Cao got himself a crossbow and a loaded quiver before effortlessly sheathing a military bayonet in his belt. Yang Dawei took a kukri while Qian Dakui took a dagger and proceeded to close the trunk.

Qian Dakui looked at Luo Yuan’s peculiar expression and awkwardly explained, “Don’t look at me like that! I’d take my signature shield if I could, but I’m a gunman now. I can’t afford to weigh myself down with any excess weaponry.”

“Why are you explaining yourself? I wasn’t laughing at you!”

As Luo Yuan patted Qian Dakui on the shoulder, a car drove into the encampment and parked right next to their car. Five men got out the vehicle laughing out loud, and looked across at them. Qian Dakui’s face suddenly changed. He and one of the men glanced at each other as they walked away – neither of them wanted to start a fight inside a military encampment.

“Who are those men?” Luo Yuan asked.

Qian Dakui remained silent, his expression somber.

Yang Dawei walked beside Luo Yuan and answered in a whisper, “We don’t really know who they are, just that they are from Hedong City and that we once got into a fight with them.”

Luo Yuan could tell that the trio had not been on the winning side of the fight, so he decided against asking any further questions.

Before they were allowed to enter the central building of the encampment, they had to go through a checkpoint. After they were given the all-clear, they entered the lobby of a torn building that might have once been a bank, except that now its walls and foundation were exposed to the elements. The men from Hedong City were at the counter, getting their paperwork done.

As they were approaching the counter, one of them glared and made a slit-throat gesture while his friend laughed out loud. Qian Dakui’s face reddened and he grinded his teeth in disgust. Luo Yuan was worried that they might start a fight but to his surprise, Qian Dakui took a deep breath and looked the other way. The atmosphere was tense, but it wasn’t just Qian Dakui. Luo Yuan noticed that Zhang Cao and Yang Dawei seemed equally provoked, their faces dark while they held themselves back, a mixture of anger and fear in their eyes.

He still found the tension between the two parties peculiar, so he

observed the men from Hedong City some more. While he was looking at them, one of the men noticed and smirked at him. Luo Yuan was impressed that this stranger had sensed his covert observation. He was certain that he was the one that had been disturbing Qian Dakui's party.

This can't be right. He looks too average to exert so much terror, his aura isn't even that intimidating! He's just so... normal. You wouldn't even notice him in a crowd. It's pretty damn obvious that he's not the alpha of the pack. He looks more like a sidekick. Curiouser, and curiouser indeed.

Luo Yuan wrinkled his forehead, deep in thought.

When the five men finished their paperwork and left the area, only then did Qian Dakui & Co. exhale a sigh of relief and go back to their easygoing personas. Luo Yuan followed Qian Dakui into an office next to the ammunition warehouse. A middle-aged, somewhat corpulent man was lounging in the middle of the office. He was dressed in a military uniform, but looked more like a businessman. He greeted the newcomers with a smile.

“What do you need?”

Yang Dawei, who was in charge of logistics, asked Luo Yuan if he needed any weapons, but he politely declined. He explained that his own swords were all he needed and that he wasn't very good with a gun anyway.

Yang Dawei looked at Qian Dakui before he turned back to the

officer, “Just the usual, Officer Huang. We’ll have a ’56 machine gun, an ’88 shotgun, and a grenade launcher. I don’t suppose there’s been any raise in prices?”

“Still the same old price for the moment. We’re expecting a bit of a raise as the military is spending more than they used to,” the officer replied without looking up. He punched a few numbers on the calculator before he added, “The deposits will cost you a 2000-gram rice coupon. Do you need ammunition?”

Yang Dawei’s expression turned to disbelief at the prices, but he knew that there wasn’t anything they could do about it. “We’ll take twenty penetrators, a thousand common pistol bullets, five grenades rounds, and eight hand grenades.”

“That’ll be a 6850-gram rice coupon.”

Yang Dawei took out a wallet and wasted no time in paying. That was when the officer looked up and grinned, “I don’t suppose you’ll be needing a mortar?”

Chapter 49: Invisible

“Did you actually think we’re useless?” Qian Dakui said while sitting in his seat. He did not want to get out of the car.

Zhang Chao and Yang Dawei were stunned. They did not know how to respond.

Qian Dakui did not wait for Luo Yuan to respond though, he just sighed before he added, “You’re a product of evolution, right?”

“Do you mean there’s an evolved survivor among the five of them?” Luo Yuan was shocked. He suddenly looked very serious.

“Yes! The guy who was walking in the back of the group is an evolved survivor.”

Qian Dakui stopped for a second. It seemed difficult for him to talk about this. “Actually his capabilities are just slightly higher than ordinary people’s, but his superpower is frightful. He can make himself invisible!”

Invisible? Luo Yuan frowned. He was not aware that evolved survivors could have that ability.

“A while ago, citizens of Hedong City and Donghu City got into a terrible fight that caused many severe injuries and deaths. The people from Hedong City suggested a negotiation half-way into the battle, and we didn’t want the battle to go on either, so we signed

an agreement without much consideration. However, not a moment later, more than 10 people died just out of the blue. Perhaps everyone would be dead now if we hadn't scared that guy with our guns!"

"Then why do you still want to come? Aren't you afraid that he might come back and attack you?" Luo Yuan asked curiously. He did not really understand them, nor did he believe that helping him find the dead bird's body was their only motive.

Qian Dakui suddenly looked awkward. Luo Yuan might not have a lot of social experience, but Qian Dakui was even worse. He was incapable of hiding his emotions. Luo Yuan knew he was not telling the truth to him. He looked at Qian Dakui and asked, "So, are you going to point a gun at me?"

Zhang Chao looked panicked and slowly moved his hand to the short knife in his boot while Yang Dawei touched the handle of his knife. They could not hide from Luo Yuan anymore.

As Luo Yuan stared at them, they instantly turned pale and drops of sweat started forming on their foreheads. Qian Dakui looked just as frightened. He hadn't been this scared even when he was facing gigantic mutated beasts. He quickly said, "Everybody, don't move! Brother Luo, please don't misunderstand. I didn't expect us to bump into them."

Luo Yuan looked even more serious.

Qian Dakui knew he could not hide it anymore so he said,

“Alright, I have an idea. We have been resting for a few days since the fight. We actually wanted to try and make some more money in other places, but when you mentioned the feathers, I thought we should stay.”

Luo Yuan knew something was wrong if Qian Dakui was trying to pressure him. Although he was not comfortable with it, it did not make him angry. He said, “That’s fine, all I want to know is if you really have the feathers.”

“Of course! Why would I lie to you?” Qian Dakui said immediately, sounding regretful.

“That’s good then,” Luo Yuan said.

Everyone felt relieved. They realized they had all been sweating just from that short conversation. “Brother Luo, I guess you’re an evolved survivor too?” Qian Dakui asked hesitantly.

Luo Yuan looked stunned as he nodded his head. That was a good way for him to hide his special abilities. Zhang Chao and Yang Dawei exchanged a look, both of them looking amazed, while Qian Dakui had an “It’s true, huh” expression on his face.

Luo Yuan changed the topic, “Alright, now what? Where should we go?”

He opened the door and got out of the car. “Since we have a lot of time on our hands, how about we look for the body of the mutated

bird?" Qian Dakui suggested.

"That's a good idea. Let me use the washroom first."

He walked towards a burned tree and stopped right under it. He smiled and touched the handle of his knife with his hand. A green light flashed and then disappeared as blood spilled out. There was the sound of someone moaning in pain. Suddenly, a person slowly appeared up ahead and walked towards Luo Yuan. He was covering his abdomen with his hands as blood dripped from his wound. He looked pale as he said, "That's impossible! How did you see me?"

It was the man who had smiled at Luo Yuan earlier. However, now his smile seemed to have been replaced by fear and madness. Qian Dakui and the others looked shocked as they quickly drew their weapons out and stayed on alert. "Just a small trick," Luo Yuan said slowly. "If you tell me where all your buddies are, I might consider letting you go."

Luo Yuan had looked around the place earlier, but had not noticed anything strange about it. Apparently, his partners were not there. Invisibility was just a small trick for Luo Yuan. It was enough to trick his eyes, but not his senses. Luo Yuan had noticed the man when he was about 10 meters away. He could have killed him if he'd wanted to, but he decided to get more information out of him. To him, a man who couldn't use chemical weapons was not a threat. However, ordinary people owning modern weapons were extremely dangerous. Luo Yuan needed to know where all those people were in order to kill them. He had already initiated the fight, and he did not plan on getting killed while he was hunting in the forest.

“Impossible! It was just a coincidence. You can’t possibly have seen me! You were just lucky.” He did not seem to have been listening to what Luo Yuan had said.

Apparently, he was so overconfident he was willing to risk his own life. Zhang Chao held his sniper rifle as a warning while Qian Dakui and Yang Dawei walked towards him. They seemed shocked as they looked at the man who had haunted their dreams. Yang Dawei said, “It’s him! The evolved survivor?”

The man looked at them arrogantly as he regained his confidence. He then looked at Luo Yuan and laughed like a maniac, “I haven’t suffered a severe injury like this since I survived the evolution. Anyway, you won’t be so lucky next time!”

The next second, the man had disappeared.

Bang!

Zhang Chao fired, but he missed because of the people blocking him. Luo Yuan smiled coldly as he stepped confidently on the ground and leaped over 10 meters ahead of them in an instant.

The Zhanmadao sliced across something invisible, producing a green flash before an arm flew into the air. The man appeared again, falling to the ground. He was in severe pain and suffering from massive blood loss. He looked very pale, but he was strong and did not make any sound except for a single cry of pain. Luo Yuan said angrily, “Your trick is useless against me, so stop testing

my patience! Tell me where your friends are!”

“The first time could be a coincidence, but the second one probably isn’t. You really can see me, or sense me.” The man looked at Luo Yuan helplessly as he added, “I can tell you where they are, but I want to know how you can see me!”

Luo Yuan could sense that the man was stubborn and he knew it would be useless to say no. “Alright,” he said.

“Our captain was not happy with Donghu citizens, so he sent me here to kill you. If you follow the small road for 3 kilometers, then you will find them. Good luck to you!”

“How do I know that what you just said is true? You could be trying to lead me into the habitat of a mutated beast,” Luo Yuan said as he smiled.

“I don’t need to lie to you!” the man said, looking mad. “Those are not my buddies, they’re just my comrades. Evolution might have gifted me with invisibility, but my speed and power are just like anybody else’s. I help them kill humans and they help me kill mutated beasts. It’s a fair trade.”

“Alright, I believe you. You can go now.” Luo Yuan could see that the man was extremely arrogant and he kind of liked him for that. He had already lost an arm and had a cut on his abdomen. He’d be lucky to survive.

Yang Dawei wanted to stop him, but he did not say anything when he saw the calm expression on Luo Yuan's face.

"You're not going to kill me?" The man looked touched.

"You're no threat to me," Luo Yuan said. "Plus, I can see you thanks to my senses!"

"An instinct?" The man looked confused while his body shook. He had not expected the ability that he had been so proud of to be so easily beaten.

"Let's go!" Luo Yuan turned around and told Qian Dakui.

Zhang Chao hesitated for a moment, but when he saw Qian Dakui shake his head, he released the buckle and stood up with his sniper rifle. Luo Yuan had heard the sound of flowing water when they'd first arrived at the entrance of the forest. He turned around and saw the man use his left arm to slit his own throat with a short knife. Luo Yuan looked at him as he fell to the ground. Then he turned around again.

When something you're so proud of is deemed worthless by others, you suddenly find your life to be meaningless. That was an extremely stubborn person and the first evolved survivor Luo Yuan had met. The white clouds were spread evenly across the sky like scales on a fish. Beneath them was a borderless forest, so green and lively compared to the sky above.

It was a new forest grown from farmland in just a few months time. Although it could not be compared to older forests that had already existed for thousand years, it was already on that scale. Big trees with meter-wide trunks were pretty common. In other words, this forest was lush and more active than the older ones. The farmland had already been covered, and the footprints of farmers on it would never be found again.

There was a gray layer of humus on the ground that felt soft and loose when you stepped on it. It was the result of grass being defeated by natural evolution. However, some grass had managed to survive it by adapting to the dense environment and limited sunlight, and evolving into climbing plants that grew up big trees to absorb the sunlight and nutrients. There were several people walking carefully down the small road.

Chapter 50: Leeches

Zhang Chao pulled the trigger and fired. There was a light, soft sound, and a badger-like mutated beast got shot on its head and fell silently to the ground. They stepped over its body and moved forward, leaving it lying dead by the side of the road.

“Primary mutated animals are worthless. Half a kilo of meat can only buy you one kilo of food stamps. If we can’t find any secondary level animals, we might be facing a loss if we use too many bullets on the trip there and back,” Luo Yuan said.

Qian Dakui knew that this was Luo Yuan’s first time there. To make up for the rift in their friendship, he whispered, “Secondary level mutated animals are worth more money. Half a kilo of meat can buy you 15 kilos of food stamps, and this is not even a set price. You can probably get a higher price in the black market. You could get up to 50 kilos of food stamps. But each person can only trade 1.5 kilos of meat. The rest is taken by the military base.”

“Primary mutated animals?” Luo Yuan asked uncertainly.

“This is according to the military base. The mutated rats you killed in Donghu city were classified as primary mutants, and the King Rat was a secondary level mutant. The military base has a special of examining the animals,” Qian Dakui explained.

According to the system examination, animals that ranked white had to be primary level and the ones that ranked light blue were secondary level. Luo Yuan nodded. Usually light blue rank animals

were bigger in size. Even the small ones weighed more than 50 kilos, and the big ones could weigh a few hundreds, some maybe even a ton. If they were lucky enough to hunt a secondary level mutant, it would be more than enough to cover the expenses of their weapons and bullets. In fact, profit was proportional to the risk. Blue rank mutants would definitely be worth a lot more than that.

“Wait! Don’t move!” Zhang Chao, who was walking in the far back, shouted.

Luo Yuan immediately stopped and checked his surroundings carefully, but he didn’t notice anything strange. He felt uncertain. Zhang Chao took out his short army knife and walked over quickly. He cut down one of the leaves in front of Luo Yuan. He saw something moving when the leaf fell to the ground. That was not a leaf. It was a green worm, though it looked very similar to its surrounding leaves. It was difficult to tell the difference if they did not pay close attention.

“Damn it! It’s a mutated leech!” Yang Dawei shouted as he checked it out properly. Then he rushed to the front and sliced the leech in two.

Blood flew freely from its body. Yang Dawei did not look relieved though. He turned to Qian Dakui and asked him, “Please check if there are any on my back!”

Qian Dakui looked frightened as he opened Yang Dawei’s shirt to check. “No, nothing. Everyone check your bodies!” he said before he checked his pants as well.

Although Luo Yuan had his doubts, he realized that something was wrong when he saw his friends' reactions. He used his senses to check his entire body, but did not sense anything different. They checked on each other as well.

"Nothing," Zhang Chao sighed as he tied his pants tightly.

"I am safe too," said Qian Dakui before he looked at Luo Yuan and asked, "Brother Luo, don't you want to check too?"

Luo Yuan shook his head and said, "No, I would sense it."

Qian Dakui didn't ask any further. He remembered how he had easily noticed the invisible man. He was aware that Luo Yuan was a man with powers beyond his imagination.

"Thank god we realized it in time," Yang Dawei said, looking grateful. "Can't believe there are mutated leeches. I can't imagine what would happen if it had gotten into our bodies."

Luo Yuan was slightly nervous when he asked, "They can do that?"

Yang Dawei nodded. He looked scared as he explained, "Once they latch onto your skin, they only need a few minutes to enter your body through the wound. The scariest thing is, you won't feel anything throughout the process, and once it absorbs enough blood from your body, it will lay eggs. You will get very skinny and

die in less than a day from blood loss. Then the mutated leech will squeeze out of your body." He slowly lowered his voice and added, "One of our friends actually died from such an attack. We left that area, but we didn't expect to see any here."

Luo Yuan felt extremely uncomfortable while he listened. He had not expected that blood-sucking leeches would have already become so terrifying.

"Are we still going over there?" Zhang Chao asked.

Yang Dawei looked very nervous. Qian Dakui looked at Luo Yuan for a second, but Luo Yuan did not object. He said, "I believe they will be in other places too, so we'll have to be more careful. Let's go."

Although it was Luo Yuan who had killed the invisible man, his comrades would certainly be coming after Qian Dakui, Zhang Chao, and Yang Dawei. They probably would not stop pursuing them if they found out that the invisible man was dead. It was definitely better to kill them before they sought revenge. Zhang Chao nodded and followed, holding his sniper rifle. Yang Dawei hesitated before he sighed and joined the group.

All of them stayed alert and checked carefully every single branch along the way. They found several mutated leeches in just a few hundred meters of journey. They also came across the dried corpse of an animal by the roadside, which only served to increase their fear.

"Shhh!" Qian Dakui pushed the branches away and brought his index finger to his lips, gesturing for them to be quiet.

Several people were sitting on the ground around a clear area. One of them was lying down weakly, looking very pale. Luo Yuan looked at them through the gaps between the branches and realized they were the other four men from Hedong City. He thought his senses might be fooling him. He sensed that the guy who was lying down had become a lot skinnier, his originally round face becoming very thin and narrow.

"I think there are leeches inside his body. He can't survive for long. It's three more to go," Yang Dawei said softly, sounding quite happy. He took out a grenade and installed the launcher.

"Wait! There are too many branches, they will block it. Get closer!" Qian Dakui advised, stopping him. Yang Dawei nodded and moved forward with his rifle. They walked slightly farther before they stopped again. Suddenly, the four people on the ground seemed to sense that something was wrong. They quickly turned and looked in the direction of Qian Dakui's group.

They shouted, "Run! It's the people from Donghu City!"

Bang!

They had even not finished their sentence when Zhang Chao fired his sniper rifle. One of them was shot into pieces while a grenade exploded farther ahead.

“Damn! I missed!” Yang Dawei shouted madly. He was frustrated with himself because he had not practiced enough. It was difficult for ordinary people to master heavy weapons. Qian Dakui fired his old machine gun. After a short fight, only two of their opponents were left. They quickly took cover and began to fire again. Bullets were flying all around.

Both parties were amateurs and most of their shots did not find their targets. Luo Yuan thought their skills were actually close to his level. Besides the guy who had gotten shot by Zhang Chao, no one else had gotten injured after more than ten minutes of firing.

“F*ck! You sneaked up on us and attacked us! You f*cking Donghu people! We’re going to kill you today!” their opponents cursed while they fought.

“You motherf*ckers! You’re about to die and yet you’re still lying, huh?” Yang Dawei cursed right back.

The next moment, a bomb exploded further up front, causing a huge barrage. “They have a mortar! Dawei! Don’t save the grenade! Attack!” Qian Dakui almost jumped up when he saw their opponents using heavy weapons.

Luo Yuan leaned on the ground, frustrated by the sounds of bombs and gunfire. The naked human eye normally had a buffering time that acted as protection to prevent a brain overload. The average image differentiating speed was 24 frames per second. In other words, if you completed a motion in less than a second, your eyes would not notice it. The speed of bullets was 700-800 meters per second on average, and they could travel 30-40 meters

in 1/24 seconds, which the naked eye could not capture.

However, this was not a problem for Luo Yuan's sixth sense. Although it was similar to eyesight, it was not an organ of the body and it was not connected with any nerves or blood vessels. It extended from his consciousness, meaning that he could somehow see things as he sensed them. No matter how fast a bullet could travel, it would leave a blurred image on his brain. His sixth sense was highly sensitive to moving objects, so Luo Yuan could actually see every single bullet traveling through the air.

Once or twice was bearable. However, that was almost 20 minutes of fighting. There were more than 100 bullets flying across the battlefield and his attention was forced to switch between them. Sometimes, when there were too many bullets flying at the same time, his attention was split so many ways that it drove him crazy. He suddenly felt his nose itch and he touched it. He looked at his hand and was shocked to see that it was covered in blood.

Just as he was about to retreat, he suddenly got shocked and he felt his head exploded. His attention was too focused, something that had never happened to him before. He could sense a small dot being fired toward his head. His head subconsciously leaned to the side before he could even think of moving. At the same time, a hot blast of energy passed by his ears, leaving behind a burning smell. Luo Yuan turned very pale and he had some difficulty breathing. He could feel his heart beating wildly.

His expression was one of disbelief. He wondered whether he had just managed to dodge a bullet.

Chapter 51: Lake

His excitement was immediately followed by a severe pain in his head. It felt like he was being burned by a hot wire, and he was sweating from the pain of it. Blood was gushing out from his nostrils. It was normal for a human brain to shut down sometimes. Even a machine could break down after being overworked for a long period of time, and avoiding the bullet had tested the limits of Luo Yuan's brain. He was afraid that it might explode if he had to avoid any more attacks like that.

Bullets were still flying everywhere. Luo Yuan's forehead was drenched in sweat as he sighed.

"Damn!"

He covered his nose, but blood kept dripping between the gaps of his fingers. It felt like his brain was shaking and turning into glue. He did not feel like he was conscious anymore. Luo Yuan did not know whether those two people were going to die, but he knew he was certainly going to if they kept on firing. His sixth sense was like a double-edged sword. It made his mind stronger, but it was also a burden. And he could not bear that burden in his current physical condition.

He closed his eyes tightly, but he could still sense where the bullets were coming from. He was like a volcano about to erupt and the urge of killing was getting stronger in his mind.

"I can't wait anymore. Why not take the risk if I'm going to die

anyway?”

He took a deep breath and picked up his Zhanmadao before jumping in front of Qian Dakui and his buddies. One of his legs landed on the ground and his body moved forward at a high speed as if he was on a spring. He had already left his rational side behind. He increased his speed, and the wind around him became gradually warmer at the same time that his body was surrounded by a strong energy.

The scene around him seemed to be moving in reverse. If someone had been calculating his speed, they would have realized that it had reached 100 meters in 8 seconds. However, he was in a forest and there were a lot of branches around, not to mention the bumpy ground. Had he been in any other environment, he probably would have been able to go even faster.

“Damn! Someone is coming! He seems very fast!” a young guy with long hair shouted.

“Fire, you idiot! It’s the evolution survivor! Kill him!” a 30 year-old man scolded him. He looked shocked as he quickly placed a bomb inside the mortar.

Boom!

Unfortunately, the mortar was not a gun. Although it was easy to operate, several factors contributed to hitting the target. Only professionals could master it. Usually normal people would just fire before they could even identify the location of their target. The

man held the mortar and spun around, firing when he had passed by his target. The bomb exploded somewhere behind Luo Yuan. It had not even burned a hair on Luo Yuan's head.

The guy with the long hair had used up all the bullets in his rifle. "Quickly, pass me a grenade!" he said as he threw the rifle aside.

"F*ck you! Get one yourself!" the middle-aged man cursed, clearly mad at him. His palm was sweaty as he picked up a grenade and put his finger through the ring.

Luo Yuan was as fast as a ghost. The branches in the forest did not affect his speed anymore. Initially, he had been 100 meters away from the two men, but it had taken just a moment for him to catch up. Now he was a mere 10 meters away from them. His killing instinct felt locked inside that time capsule, making him feel extremely uncomfortable.

"Run!" The thought had crept into his mind and filled his heart. Luo Yuan stared at the young man, who was still looking for the grenade, and thought silently, "Don't blame me. Blame yourself for being stupid."

The young man had not realized that Luo Yuan was so close. He had taken a grenade out of his bag and was about to stand up. It was very hard for him to breathe and his heart felt like it was cramping. He raised his head. Suddenly, his pupils contracted at the same time that his hair was blown back by a strong wind.

"F*ck!"

A green beam flashed and then disappeared. The young man felt like he was flying before he had even managed to finish his word. His vision kept spinning, and he saw blood gushing out like a fountain from a corpse without a head.

Luo Yuan shook his sword out and blood began to drip down its semi-transparent blade. He picked up the rifle the young man had thrown away, plus some bullets. He inserted the bullets into the rifle while he watched the middle-aged man run farther away. He pulled the trigger and fired.

He hit the man on his third shot. The man was wearing a bulletproof jacket though, so he only staggered shortly before he kept running like crazy.

Luo Yuan took a deep breath. A sudden inspiration struck him. When he aimed at his target again, the man's brain exploded like a watermelon. He continued to run for a few steps before he fell to the ground.

"Beep!"

"After a short period of training, you have mastered the basic gun skill!"

Luo Yuan was stunned. He had only tried using a gun a few times. He'd barely even fired more than twenty shots. He certainly had not expected to master the skill in such a short period of time. He opened up the status panel.

“Knife expertise: 0”

“Guns: 1”

It was a surprise. After all, the men from Hedong City had been just a group of useless bullies. Their bullets had not even gotten near him. The funny thing was, Luo Yuan had almost died because of them. He was starting to get a little arrogant after escaping those bullets. His shooting skills were no better than theirs after all. Anyway, had they been in a different environment, Luo Yuan was confident that he could have made some good shots. He also had the special ability to move at a high speed, which had made it hard for the men to focus. They had been so panicked, they had just fired around randomly.

“Brother Luo, you’re awesome! You killed the two of them by yourself!” Qian Dakui said, walking up behind him a moment later.

They all stopped smiling when Luo Yuan turned around.

“Are you injured?” Yang Dawei asked.

They were so busy fighting that none of them had realized that Luo Yuan was bleeding. They were surprised to see it now. Luo Yuan looked horrible. His face and shirt were drenched in blood which, combined with the fact that he seemed to be struggling to stand still, made them think that he was severely injured.

"It's nothing, don't worry." Luo Yuan shook his head. He looked pale, but calm.

Everyone respected him for being able to act so normal while he was injured. None of them could have done the same. Luo Yuan wiped his nose. He was relieved when he realized that he was not bleeding anymore. He found a bottle of mineral water and washed his face. They all watched him, surprised to see his face clean. They were even more stunned to notice a headless corpse lying by the side of the road. Luo Yuan knew what they were looking at but he did not bother to explain. He turned to the corpse that had been attacked by the mutated leeches. It was not moving at all.

Luo Yuan wasn't sure if the man had been lucky or unlucky that he hadn't been injured during the battle. "What about this one? Should I kill him?" he asked.

"No!" Yang Dawei rushed to stop him. "It's no use trying to kill him with a knife. The eggs inside his body must already have hatched. If you kill him, the leeches will come out through the blood flow and we will be in big trouble!"

"What about burning him then? That will burn all the mutated leeches inside his body too," Qian Dakui suggested.

"That's not a bad idea," Luo Yuan agreed with him.

They made a pile of dried grass and branches and moved the corpse on top of it. However, just as they were about to light the fire, they noticed something strange about the corpse. A long

moving object was coming out of the base of the dead man's neck. There were only two in the beginning, but the body soon became packed with them. They were the size of chopsticks and about an inch in length, and they gradually covered every part of the dead body. Luo Yuan felt extremely uncomfortable looking at them.

“Dawei, hurry up! Light up the grass!” Qian Dakui shouted, looking pale.

Yang Dawei swallowed some saliva and lit up the pile of dried grass. Everyone had thought that the man was dead, however, when the flames got near the corpse, the man opened his eyes and began to struggle. He was too weak and he stopped after a few seconds. His clothes and hair were burning and turning into ashes. His struggling got weaker as his eyeballs became dry and cracked. The mutated leeches that were about to come out, squeezed back into the dead body to escape the high temperature. They could avoid the fire but they could not escape the burning flames that were going to turn the corpse into ashes.

An hour later, Luo Yuan's stomach still felt upset. He was chopping off a branch when he asked, “How long now?”

Qian Dakui envied his Zhanmadao. He was very curious about the sword. It did not look like gold or jade, but it was very sharp. All it took was one cut for it to take down a whole branch, or even a tree. He had never seen Luo Yuan try to cut the same branch twice.

Qian Dakui looked at his watch and, after estimating the time of arrival, he replied, “We are close. About 30 more minutes to go.”

Luo Yuan looked very excited, but also doubtful. “Do you think it will still be there?” he asked. “It was so long ago. Perhaps somebody else might have taken it.”

“Chances are low. It’s considered a very dangerous place so people hardly ever go there. We came across it by accident. It’s only a small lake, but there are many secondary mutants there, even some tertiary ones. We only took a look and then ran away fast. The feather you’re looking for is just beside the lake.”

Qian Dakui and his friends looked very serious. Tertiary meant blue rank. Luo Yuan knew that blue rank animals were not easy to handle. He was not confident that he could defeat a blue rank animal despite the fact he was more skilled and powerful, and had more sophisticated equipment now compared to when he had killed the guard rank green beetles.

Chapter 52: Speed Kill

The group was crouching amongst the bushes, trying not to move. After a long while, Qian Dakui raised his head to check their surroundings before quickly moving back into a crouching position.

“Brother Luo, it’s right there!” he said in a serious tone while he lowered his voice.

The leaves around them were hard and thorny. After about ten meters of crawling, every exposed part of Qian Dakui’s body was covered in bleeding scratches.

They had finally reached the highest point in the whole area. Luo Yuan stood up on his tiptoes and glanced at a spot about a hundred meters away from where they were standing.

There was a very large lake there. Because of the water source, plants around the lake were a lot lusher; some of them had even evolved to grow aerial roots, not unlike those of a banyan tree, that sank deep into the waters.

Several large mutated beasts were drinking from the lake, their ears perked up to monitor their surroundings. Suddenly, a huge yellow-green beast crept over. Its form faintly resembled that of a lizard and its heavy body left an imprint on the soft ground with each step it took.

Tail included, the mutated lizard was about 6 meters long. It was

covered in layers of yellow-green scales, each scale large as a fist and featuring a black intricate pattern that looked like growth rings. The pattern seemed to have a life of its own. Whenever the scales moved, it followed the lizard's movement as if it was a radial gradient with a black center.

What made it different from other lizards was the fact that its head had no scales. Instead, it had wrinkled brownish-black skin like an old tree bark, and facial features that resembled those of a mammal.

Once the mutated lizard got to the bank, chaos ensued. Every mutated beast in the vicinity ran for its life. The lizard raised its head and growled in content. Its long steel-like tail wiggled as it leaned down to enjoy a drink from the lake.

The black feathers on the owl's skeletal remains by the lake had been scattered around, painting the corpse's surroundings black.

Luo Yuan crouched back down, his heart thumping as he looked at the other three men, "I'm going. What about you guys?"

Qian Dakui shared a look with the other two before he said awkwardly, "We brought you here, but we're going somewhere else to hunt. It's not that we're not loyal to you, we just really can't afford to remain here any longer."

Luo Yuan had expected this as it was indeed too dangerous a place to be. They were mere acquaintances. There was no need for them to put their lives on the line, even if it would be for personal

gain. “Alright,” he said. “I still have to thank you. Hope to see you all again.”

While Qian Dakui did not believe that Luo Yuan would turn hostile over such a small matter, he was still very much relieved when the latter did not object. Waving his hand, he replied, “It was nothing, Brother Luo. Tit for tat. We hope you won’t hold a grudge anymore after this. We’ll leave the seized weapons and ammunition to you, but you should use them while you’re here. They’ll all be confiscated if you bring them back to the base!”

Zhang Dawei unfastened a backpack and left it on the ground as Luo Yuan nodded in answer.

“We shall take our leave now. Take care.”

The trio withdrew cautiously. When they were about 25 meters away, they straightened up and quickly left the dangerous zone.

Once they were gone, Luo Yuan checked the contents of the bag – five highly explosive bombs, a stun grenade, a sniper rifle, twelve [HEAT](#) warheads and hundreds of common ammunition.

High-explosive anti-tank (HEAT) warheads are a type of shaped charge explosive that uses the Munroe effect to penetrate armor. The warhead functions by having the explosive charge melt a metal liner to form a high-velocity superplastic jet.

Previously, upon Luo Yuan’s request, they had only been carrying a rifle and ammo as bringing along too many things would have only been burden. Most of the weapons, including the

mortars, had been left behind.

Luo Yuan remained in a reclining position, intending to collect the feathers after the mutated lizard had left.

After a short while, the lizard had quenched its thirst, yet it was obvious that it was not keen on leaving. Maybe the environment was too comfortable, because the lizard headed to a tree by the lakeside, observed its surroundings for a few seconds, and then took a nap under the tree's shade.

Luo Yuan waited for another half an hour, but quickly lost his patience.

“You’re the one with the death wish! Don’t blame it on me!” Had it been only him and his machete, he would have hesitated, but now that he had so many weapons, he was sure he could kill a blue rank creature.

Judging by the fact that the beast’s presence had sent all other creatures helter-skelter and that its oppressing aura was still present even as it simply lay down, Luo Yuan thought he had guessed correctly. This was indeed a blue rank mutated beast.

He picked up the rifle and loaded the HEAT warheads one by one before moving to lock the lizard’s position through the rifle scope.

Just as his killing instinct surfaced, a system notification rang.

“Level E Mission unlocked, Kill Rampage Lizard, 30 minutes time limit, Accept/Decline?”

“Accept.”

Luo Yuan felt a little hyped. He was sure he'd level up after this battle.

He took a deep breath before he aimed at the lizard's closed eyes through the rifle scope. A HEAT warhead would probably only cause it minor damage because blue rank creature defense was immensely high. If he wanted to kill it with the sniper rifle, he could only aim where its defense was the weakest – on its eyes.

Pondering all this seemed to work, as Luo Yuan calmed down after he took several deep breaths. A few seconds later, he pulled the trigger.

The creature's danger instinct was a lot stronger than a human's. Just as the trigger was pulled, the Rampage Lizard opened its eyes and lifted its head in alert as if sensing something.

Bang!

Following the low sound of the rifle, a small pool of blood splattered on the animal's back.

“Owww!”

Its howl was long and haunting, tinged with a thirst for blood.

It got up immediately and let out a threatening growl, its sapphire blue eyes turning crimson red and its long thorny tail swishing around. In an instant, it had pinpointed Luo Yuan's location.

Charging towards him, the lizard looked like a heavy tank running through a battlefield, knocking down any trees that stood on its way. Its advance forcefully cleared a wide path as trees fell around it like weeds.

Luo Yuan threw the rifle aside and stood up. His shooting skill was hopeless anyway, so he had nothing to regret.

"Looks like we have to end things the old-fashioned way," he mumbled to himself as the lizard approached with deafening stomps. "But these are not bad either. They can save me a lot of energy if I use them wisely!" He took out two grenades and threw them after pulling the pins.

Then he crouched and launched himself towards the Rampage Lizard.

He had exceptional control over space and his own body, so both grenades formed a beautiful throwing arc before they dropped and exploded accurately in front of the lizard. A blinding white light and a ball of fire rose at the same time while Luo Yuan squinted his eyes. He did not slow down.

The stun grenade and explosive bomb had both exploded.

“Owww!”

The Rampage Lizard lost its balance as its eyes were blinded by the bright light. Its heavy body bulldozed through the trees along the way, following the momentum of the highly explosive bomb.

Luo Yuan was already by its side.

His high-level knife skill had not only awarded him an exceptional knife technique, but it had also gifted him with multiple techniques and ways to exert his force. One of them was high-intensity explosive motion.

His veins protruded and he suddenly seemed to grow an inch taller. Face flashed, he accelerated his steps, generating enough force to match a typhoon, while dust and fallen leaves rolled around him like a wave.

His bloodshot eyes locked in on the Rampage Lizard's throat as a chilling, murderous aura radiated from him, freezing the air all around.

A jade green light flashed across the air as he approached the lizard, wielding his knife within the blink of an eye.

A flash of the machete.

A slash through the throat.

Luo Yuan did not stop until he was about ten meters away. Dropping to the ground, he huffed and puffed, sweating profusely as his protruding veins vanished at once.

A white rank mutated beast would have easily killed him now. The short-lived battle had exhausted all his remaining 11-point Energy.

He supported himself by holding on to his knees, his stare not wavering from the dying Rampage Lizard.

It was struggling to stand up, growling hoarsely as blood spurted from its throat like a compressed fountain. The gradual loss of blood made its struggle weaken until its legs finally gave out and it fell to the ground.

A few seconds later, a series of system notifications rang.

“Level E Mission: Kill Rampage Lizard, Completed.

Completion Time: 1 minute 15 seconds

Mission Rating: Excellent.”

“Rewarded Basic: EXP 1600!”

“Excellent Rating: EXP +1600!”

“You have leveled up and been rewarded with 1 Attribute Point and 5 Skill Points. You are now at Level 6!”

“Your Energy and Damage have received substantial recovery!”

“I’ve finally leveled up.” Luo Yuan was delighted as he felt his weak state recover instantaneously. The addition of 3200 EXP to his previous EXP of 4100/4800 had been more than enough for him to level up.

However, his excitement subsided a little as he thought of the 9600 EXP that was required for the next level up. It seemed that leveling up would only get harder in the future. Plus, because of the shitty system, once a higher-level difficulty mission had been completed, a lower-level difficulty mission was never assigned again.

When he had completed his mission of killing a guard beetle, a similar mission had not appeared again no matter how many regular green beetles he had wiped out. The mission difficulty level had only increased after that.

Calming himself down, he opened up the attributes window.

Character: Luo Yuan

Profession: Hunter

Level: 6

Experience: 2500/9600

Attributes –

Strength: 12 (10)

Dexterity: 12 (10)

Physique: 11 (10)

Intelligence: 13 (10)

Sensory Perception:12 (10)

Willpower: 13 (10)

Skills: Science 16, Math 14, Chinese 19, English 16, Finance 17,

Arithmetic 9, Dancing 1, Drawing 3, Gaming 6, Negotiating 9,
Socializing 7, Cooking 3, Driving 1,

Hand-to-Hand Combat 4, Specialist Knife Skill 0,

Gun Skill: 1

Unique Skills: Identification, Synthesis

Unassigned AP: 1

Unassigned SP: 5

Uncompleted Mission: None

Luo Yuan hesitated in distributing his AP, not sure whether to assign it to Physique or Dexterity. It had become apparent that he could not last in a battle any longer than one minute. If he had charged in high intensity explosive motion, the duration would have been even shorter. If the enemy came in greater numbers or he had to engage in a longer battle, he would be in grave danger.

If he were to strengthen his Dexterity, he would probably last an even shorter amount of time. If he strengthened his Physique though, the increase in his attributes brought about by the level-up would seem insignificant, most likely allowing him to last a little

longer in a battle.

This was a double-edged word. However, Luo Yuan, who believed in short-lived battles, decided to add his AP to Dexterity. As for his Physique, he would think about it later. Maybe he could increase it through some high-intensity training.

Following the subsiding of a warm flow inside his body, Luo Yuan once again had the illusion that the world had become slower. A 13-point Dexterity would mean that his reflexes would get quicker than the average person by 3.375 times. That included his vision.

If there were still television programs or movies, he would have tragically realized that he could now only see separate pictures in motion instead of a complete motion picture.

Chapter 53: Dramatized

Luo Yuan tried running and realized that his speed had only increased around two times, partly constrained by the limitations of his own energy.

However, he would still have seemed incredibly fast to an average person. They'd only be able to see a blurry shadow if he were to wield his knife or slash through something.

As expected, his Physique could not keep up with his advanced speed. His muscles ached and he huffed in exhaustion after only slashing around ten times or so.

Luo Yuan smiled wryly as he held on to his knife and approached the Rampage Lizard.

Even dead, the huge beast still gave out an oppressing aura that seemed to silence its surroundings completely. No other living creature made a sound.

The highly explosive bomb had burnt through the lizard's stomach and blood was trickling from it. However, when Luo Yuan wiped away the burned skin, he was surprised to see that they were merely superficial injuries. The bomb could do nothing to destroy the beast's defense.}

He forcefully pulled on one of its scales, and it made a crisp jade-like sound. It was sturdy, yet flexible, and showed no signs of breaking even after Luo Yuan had brutally pulled it to a 90 degree

angle.

“Not too bad a material!” Luo Yuan praised, remaining calm. He was no more in the pathetic state he had been in; his blue rank equipment almost covered him from head to toe. He used Identification, and quickly grew disinterested as he discovered that there was nothing special about the scales.

He unscaled the lizard by drawing a line across the middle of its stomach, baring its coarse net-like skin and dissecting the corpse.

Once the stomach had been dissected, showcasing the animal's innards, he was able to spot the heart. It was as big as a coconut. He cut it off immediately using his machete.

“Let's hope I evolve this time. I'm gonna get as twisted as they come if this goes on for much longer.” He stared at the heart bitterly before finally, reluctantly taking a bite out of it.

The wave of nausea did not delay his ingestion of the organ. He ate the whole heart in just a matter of minutes.

The results were similar to the last few times. There were no additional benefits other than some excessive sweating and extra ecstasy.

Luo Yuan was slightly disappointed. He sighed as he resumed dissecting the animal.

He beheaded the Rampage Lizard with care, following the lines of the skull for fear of damaging his machete.

After struggling for a long time, he was finally able to slide the lizard's brain, which weighed about 2.4 kilograms, into a plastic bag he'd found in his pocket.

He knew that the essence of the huge beast lay within its brain and heart, especially within its brain. He had only eaten the King Rat's brain the other time, and his Sensory Perception had improved significantly.

Huang Jiahui and Wang Shishi had both eaten a significant amount of flesh, but it had done nothing much to increase their strength. They would not even have noticed the change, had Luo Yuan not pointed it out. It was evident that there was a huge difference between the brain and the flesh.

Luo Yuan tied the plastic bag and threw it aside as he began to observe parts of the beast's body selectively. He chopped off both its hind legs, which were the most fleshy.

The Rampage Lizard's hind legs were around 1.5 meters long, each of them weighing more than a hundred catties, which equaled to a 100 kilograms in total.

Luo Yuan hoisted them without feeling much strain, but he could not bring along any more. His weak Physique would not allow him to last long, even though his Strength could handle the weight.

He went over to the lakeside to collect the black owl's feathers.

A few black beetles the size of a human palm left the ivory white skeleton and escaped into the bushes in fear.

Luo Yuan noticed that there were about seven bullets under the skeleton. He guessed that the owl had either been killed by a nearby base or by fighter jet flying in the sky.

The feathers were everywhere. It took Luo Yuan a good ten minutes to collect them all. He gathered around 700 – 800 of them, which was well beyond his expectations. Of course, not all feathers were two feet long. Most of them were semiplumes. There were only seven tail feathers about two meters in length.

Luo Yuan chopped down a rattan that he found nearby and tied the feathers into a bundle.

Just as Luo Yuan was preparing to leave, the sound of water flowing came not far from him, at the same time that a rustling sound was heard from the surrounding forest.

Luo Yuan sensed the change in atmosphere and looked towards the center of the lake in suspense. Pupils contracted, he saw a gigantic shadow serpentine forward at an incredible speed, forming a long line on the surface of the lake.

Hundreds of mutated fish in various sizes flopped out of the lake in fear while the serpentine shadow headed in Luo Yuan's

direction. Luo Yuan quickly got up, holding onto the handle of his knife.

As the shadow approached the lakeside, its body slowly floated upwards until a malicious head the size of a millstone broke the surface, water pouring down its smooth scales.

Luo Yuan held in his breath.

This was a gigantic mutated snake. The one he had seen in Gaotang Town paled in comparison to this one. Its vertical, elliptical pupils possessed the chilling gaze that was characteristic of a cold-blooded creature.

Other than its pupils, form and scales though, nothing else about the beast resembled a snake.

Its mouth was elongated like a crocodile's, baring a set of sharp, jagged teeth that looked exceptionally ferocious. There was also a small bump on its head and to Luo Yuan's surprise, its large nostrils were fuming white mist.

All these formed an eerie, yet mysteriously valiant scene for Luo Yuan.

“Level E+ Mission unlocked, Kill Dragon Snake. 30 minutes time limit, Accept/Reject?”

“F*ck! Level E+ Mission.” Luo Yuan came back to his senses as a

chill ran down his spine.

He immediately rejected the mission and ran for his life.

A Level E+ Mission meant that the creature was blue rank. Considering Luo Yuan's capabilities at the time, there was no chance of winning at all. He probably would not even be able to break its defense.

His upgraded Dexterity surfaced at once, his surroundings flowing backwards in a blur as he shot more than 20 meters forward within just a few breaths' time.

He huffed and looked back, noticing that the dragon snake was indeed serpentining towards him. However, it it did not seem to be in any hurry. It was trailing behind him lazily as if going on a picnic.

His heart calmed down slightly. The beast was clearly not after him. It was just attracted by the copper scent of the Rampage Lizard's blood. It would probably still have eaten him for dessert though, if he had lingered around long though.

On that note, Luo Yuan changed direction at once.

Indeed, the dragon snake had stopped tailing him and was heading straight towards the lizard's corpse.

Taking a relieved breath, he quickly ran back towards the spot

where he had first observed the lake in hiding. However, a sense of dissatisfaction rose in him as he watched the snake feast on the lizard's corpse.

He had placed all his haul near the dead animal, thinking that the black owl's skeleton was not far from it and he could easily see anyone approaching from there. Now all of it would be gone. The gigantic snake would surely not leave anything behind for him.

His eyes glinted as they landed on the four remaining bombs inside the backpack.

“I'm leaving with a bang.”

He tied up the four bombs with a tough leaf and used another leaf to string together the triggering pins.

Luo Yuan collected everything he wanted under his left arm, and checked to see if anything had been left behind before standing up again. He felt that his energy had been replenished.

He pulled all four pins at once and threw the bundled bombs. The moment the bundle left his hand, he knew he had thrown it off target, but he didn't have the time to give it much thought. He just turned and ran.

After waiting for an estimated amount of time, he turned to take a look back and his eyeballs almost dropped out of his head.

The bundle had passed the snake's body and continued flying towards its back. If nothing had intercepted it, the bombs' explosive range would probably only have reached the snake's tail.

Perhaps the action had immensely offended the dragon snake's dignity though, because the creature suddenly interrupted its meal and swallowed the bundle with a swish of its head.

Luo Yuan was beyond shocked. His mouth was hanging open and he seemed to have forgotten how to run.

The next moment, a dull boom was heard.

The dragon snake's stomach expanded and its gigantic body jumped slightly in ricochet. The jounce had the snake puffing smoke on the ground as it raised its head and howled in pain, thrashing about in agony.

Those were highly explosive bombs, not just average fireworks. However strong the creature's defense was on the outside, its insides were still made of flesh and blood. Even Luo Yuan could feel a pang of pain for it. He doubted there would even be an organ left intact after the detonation.

"It can't possibly survive such a serious injury, no matter how strong it is. What a pity, I should've accepted the mission!" Luo Yuan thought regrettably.

However, regardless of how active his imagination was, he would

never have imagined such a dramatic plot twist. He still felt like he was in a dream.

The dragon snake thrashed endlessly, emitting anguished cries. Its evolved vocal cords belted out bright, resonant sounds that reached Luo Yuan's ears, even though he was a hundred meters away.

Just as Luo Yuan thought it was meeting its death, the snake stopped struggling and lifted its head several meters into the air, gazing around in a murderous glare.

It did a round check, but did not manage to find the culprit. With an enraged growl, it quickly serpentine back into the water, disappearing as several crimson swirls surfaced on the lake.

"It ran off just like that?" Luo Yuan mumbled to himself in disbelief. He stood up after quite a while and looked at the calm lake.

He stared at it in a daze, thinking that a gigantic corpse would probably surface not too long later. He wanted nothing to do with that, though. He would never dare swim across the lake. As a land creature, the water was far more dangerous for him than the forest.

He took a long look before he headed back.

The dragon snake had already ingested half the Rampage Lizard's

corpse. While the hind legs he had chopped off had remained untouched, he was crestfallen to see the plastic bag that contained the brain.

It looked like it had been squashed by something heavy. Not one bit of the lizard's brain inside it could be salvaged.

“What's this?”

He had found a half-buried scale beside the plastic bag. One that did not look like it belonged to the lizard.

Chapter 54: Freezing

“What’s this?” Luo Yuan had found a half-buried scale beside the plastic bag. One that did not look like it belonged to the lizard.

He pulled the scale out and saw that it was the size of a ping pong ball, smooth and shiny, with a blue sheen. It looked like an unpolluted spring amidst an old forest. It remained untainted despite the fact that it had been half-buried in sand.

What was even more amazing, was that Luo Yuan could feel a refreshing coolness radiating from it as he held it in his hand. Looking at the familiar scale, he suddenly thought, “It couldn’t be a dragon snake scale, could it?”

The more he looked at it, the more familiar it felt, so he decided to use Identification:

“Dragon Snake Scale”

“Usage: Material”

“Rarity: Blue”

“Weight: 10.3g”

“Comments: This is a scale shed by a molting dragon snake. It

possesses mild Cold Energy properties.”

Luo Yuan’s heart thumped, his previous worries vanishing in an instant. That scale alone was worth just as much, if not more, than a whole Rampage Lizard.

This meant that his machete could level up again. To a warrior like him, a sharp weapon was of utmost importance. From a certain point of view, having a good weapon would increase a person’s combat skills in several aspects.

Even though he had reached Level 12 and had added 2 points to all his attributes, he could only run when faced with a dragon snake. He would probably never be able to break its defense in a battle.

Furthermore, this scale was all the more valuable because it held attribute abilities. He would not swap it for ten Rampage Lizards.

Luo Yuan felt shaken. Afraid that he might have been mistaken, he tried using Identification once more, looking at it in detail this time. He realized that it had a different description for the dragon snake’s Cold Energy attribute compared to the black owl’s attribute.

One was “mild” while the other was “weak”. Those few letters made a world of difference. The energy this scale contained was obviously much higher than the black owl’s.

“If I found one, then it must have shed more,” Luo Yuan thought, his eyes glinting as he began searching for more scales nearby.

Indeed, in a few minutes he had found a second one under a fallen tree.

The next few hours, Luo Yuan searched the whole area, finding a lot of loot. He had discovered a total of 16 scales and an organ the size of a pineapple lying by the dragon snake.

He turned the organ over and sideways, yet he could not determine which part of the animal's innards it used to be prior to the explosion. He had to use Identification to determine that it was part of the dragon snake's liver.

The effect was still the same as that of blue and light blue rank flesh. It only slightly increased his body's attributes. It would seem that blue rank creature flesh would all have the same insignificant effect on increasing human physical potential.

Maybe it was because the system had categorized all levels of blue creatures as blue rank. While the levels differed, the quality remained the same. Even if the quantity consumed was increased, the effect on the human body would still be limited. Consuming even more of it after reaching the limit would at most improve the body's potential by a little.

Luo Yuan did not synthesize. Instead, he collected his things, intending to leave the place right away.

The dragon snake had left its scent there earlier and no other mutated beasts dared approach. However, the scent would not have lasted long anyway. In addition to the smell of the blood, the sense of intimidation would also weaken over time.

Ruffling sounds could be heard around the forest. The threatening aura that had been surrounding the area was wearing off. Considering his weak Physique, even if the animals that approached were light blue or white rank, how many could he really kill?

Besides, it was not Luo Yuan's style to engage in battles without benefits.

He left the area speedily, returning once again to the small path he had used when he had first entered the forest.

Luo Yuan stopped by a shaded, well-concealed spot to synthesize the materials at hand.

He wasn't impatient. He was just worried that the base would confiscate the materials. His worry was not unfounded either. He had heard several times now that the military was collecting raw materials from living creatures. The middle-aged man who had sold him the black owl's feathers the previous day had also mentioned a bio-bulletproof vest. This only proved the military's emphasis on bio-materials.

Furthermore, blue rank creatures were not average creatures. It would not be farfetched to say that the military would very rarely

get to meet one, and they would never pass up a material left behind by such a creature.

To avoid any crazy assumptions and unwanted branching plots, it would be safer to just synthesize everything now.

In order to prevent an accident, Luo Yuan took out of his pocket a HEAT warhead he had prepared for the experiment and synthesized it with a black owl's feather. Then he synthesized the finished product once more using two scales, confirming that such a synthesis was possible.

Luo Yuan put the synthesized warhead aside and began to synthesize his machete. A thought suddenly came to him, and he picked up the warhead again. He was actually rather disappointed in the Type 88 rifle. The warhead had been clamped down by the lizard's muscle after going through its scales. It had not even inflicted a serious injury.

It was fine to shoot a person with, but had proved useless against a mutated beast, especially one that was blue rank or higher. This was not just due to its narrow muzzle and insufficient velocity. The malleability of the bullet's alloy steel was also to blame.

When he had found the bullet, it had already been squashed into a round disk. If he were able to use it again after leveling up to blue rank, the effect would probably be vastly different.

Only experimenting would tell though.

Luo Yuan shoved the bullet into his pocket and began synthesizing the machete.

Through the use of several scales, the machete transformed again. The earlier synthesized green beetle material was slowly chased away, jade green powder gradually seeping out and slipping down, following the machete's smooth handle.

When the thirteenth scale had turned into a hole-filled residue, the machete finally evolved to blue rank. Looking at the last remaining scale, Luo Yuan hesitated before using it to synthesize the machete too.

“Chilling Machete”

“Material: Alloy, Dragon Snake Scales”

“Rarity: Blue”

“Weight: 4.3kg”

“Attack: 25 – 29”

“Additional Effect: Attack Speed +1

“Additional Effect 2: Freezing, reduces temperature to -30°C immediately, Cooldown Time: 24 hours;

Trigger Condition: Specialist Knife Skill;

Current State: Activated”

“Equipment Requirements: Strength 11 Points”

“Comments: This is a machete that will chill any enemy!”

“Sharp Machete” had become “Chilling Machete” while its attack power had increased by 5 points and an additional effect had appeared – freezing, a powerful and special ability.

Looking at the effect trigger condition, he had a bad premonition. Holding onto the cool machete handle, he sliced off a thick branch like it was tofu, slashing at it in concentration.

He leaned forward to touch the cut.

Indeed, other than a mild coolness, it did not feel frozen at all. It seemed that he would need to increase his Willpower and fully master the Specialist Knife Skill before he could trigger the Freezing effect.

It would not be long now. He had already faintly felt the sense of focusing his mind onto a single goal when he had killed the Rampage Lizard earlier. When the blade had slashed through its

throat, it had felt like there was no obstacle. The slice had been smooth and precise.

Luo Yuan went on to synthesize both his boots and jacket to blue rank until they could not be synthesized any more. They were all Speed +3 equipment now.

Then he found the car left behind by the five men from Hedong City and drove it back to the base.

After a meticulous check by two patrolling guards, he was let inside.

The sun was setting now, so the base looked far merrier compared to its deserted state in the morning, when most of the hunters had returned from the forest.

Under the supervision of a soldier, Luo Yuan moved both the lizard's hind legs to one of the warehouses. Very quickly, someone came by and sliced a piece of meat off to check it.

“That’s it?” The soldier locked his expressionless gaze on him and warned him, “You don’t look familiar, this must be your first time. You’d be punished severely if we found out that you kept something for private use. You could even be confined for a few days depending on the seriousness of your offense!”

“It’s all here!” Luo Yuan replied emotionlessly.

“It’s third level meat!” the soldier who was checking the flesh said, lifting his head. His breathing seemed to have quickened.

It was not every day that one came across third level meat, even someone in his line of work. This level of creature had already evolved to a certain level of intelligence. After that time when the base had just been built and some third level creatures had come wandering to their deaths, they had rarely been seen anymore.

“You killed this?” A hint of surprise and suspicion flashed across the soldier’s otherwise expressionless face. “What weapon did you use? I remember your pass, you did not rent any weapons!”

“I think I have the right to refuse to answer that question, don’t I?” Luo Yuan replied, sounding a little upset.

The soldier’s face soured immediately. Hunters were always sucking up to him and bribing him in hopes that he would be lenient in his check. That had been the norm. Who knew he would meet such a reckless neophyte that day.

He got closer to Luo Yuan and sneered, “Indeed, you have the right not to answer, but for the sake of this base and its safety, I’ll search your car later. I suspect that you’re in private possession of ammunition!”

Luo Yuan was stunned. He looked at him and smiled before replying in the same low voice, “I think you’ve forgotten something. You and I both know that I don’t have any firearms in my possession, so how do you think I hunted this third level

beast?”

Something seemed to be dawning on the soldier as his face paled.

Luo Yuan went on, “I heard that the military’s recruiting evolved humans and the pay’s not that bad. You’re accusing me of private possession of ammunition and breaking the base’s rules, but what do you think would happen if you reported this? Let’s take a guess! Private possession of firearms! Very well! It’s not too big nor too small an offense, but I’d still be arrested and have to state my identity. I’d be recruited into the military without a second thought. And then maybe, you’d suddenly find me in a position higher than yours. By then, some of the superiors might find themselves wanting to please us evolved civilians and chase away some black sheep. What do you think of that?”

The soldier’s face went from pale as a sheet to flushed red. He did not utter a single word for a long time.

Chapter 55: Earthworm

“Third level mutated meat. It’s 80 catties of food stamps per one catty of meat, and you can keep five catties for yourself,” a plump supervisor in a military uniform said with a smile while two soldiers weighed the meat.

It would be foolish to think that there was no business talent in the military. They had to raise most of their funds themselves before the mutation, so they were willing to engage in any profitable business. There was also a lot of smuggling was going on in the military since soldiers could afford to be bolder than most people. There were also soldiers who had bribed their way into the armed forces, thus making corruption in the military a common phenomenon.

Luo Yuan was slightly surprised. He had not expected blue rank creature meat to sell for such a high price, but he dismissed that thought promptly. Rare things were usually more precious, and this meat’s value was far more superior than that of light blue rank meat. Its price would probably be inflated even further when the military resold it.

It was indeed a profitable business.

Luo Yuan did not have a lot of options. He had earned a total of 18,500 catties of food stamps plus the five catties of meat he had saved for himself. This was the first time he felt like making money was easy.

There was also a routine check. Under Luo Yuan's imposing gaze, the soldier completed a rough check before he ran away, breaking out in cold sweat. Luo Yuan's hiding tactic was not that clever. He had simply stuffed everything under the car seat. After all, a car could only be so big, and its hiding spots were limited. Besides, his loot was not small in size. It could easily be spotted if one checked with a little more discipline. The soldier though had feigned complete ignorance.

Before coming to the base, he had already thought of all possible countermeasures, including bribery. His threat though had been more than enough to force the soldier into cooperating. He had not expected it to work so well, but in the end he did not have to use any of the countermeasures he had prepared.

"If only I'd known, I'd have hidden more things!" Luo Yuan sighed. He'd been worried that he would not be able to bluff his way out of the check if he'd kept too many things, so he'd only hidden the dragon snake's innards and the remaining black owl feathers. The thought filled him with regret.

At least there would still be more chances in the future.

Luo Yuan stuffed the lizard's meat into his rucksack and left the base in his van.

When he got to the entrance of the residential area, he sensed that something was not right. There was a faint pungent smell coming from the area. He drove on and saw a crowd of people up ahead. They looked like they were watching some sort of drama to unfold.

Feeling curious, Luo Yuan parked his car nearby and got out while holding on to his rucksack. Scanning the area, he saw that Huang Jiahui and Wang Shishi were both there. He went over to them, nudged Huang Jiahui's arm and asked, "What's going on here?"

Huang Jiahui snapped her head back when she heard his voice, "Oh, you're back?"

"What are you guys doing crowding over here? What's happened?" Luo Yuan asked again.

"There's a large earthworm drilling holes in the area, and someone fell into one of them!" Wang Shishi answered without waiting for further questions.

"Are they safe now?"

"I don't know. People said that they heard a cry, but there were no more signs of life after that. The holes are very deep. A few brave people have tried checking them out with flashlights, but the light couldn't reach the bottom," Huang Jiahui said, sounding bothered. After experiencing the hopelessness of the worm tide, she appreciated the current peace and stability more than anyone.

"You two don't get too close, it might be dangerous. I'll go check it out!" he said hurriedly.

“Be careful.” Huang Jiahui knew Luo Yuan’s capabilities so she did not try to stop him.

He nodded and squeezed forcefully his way through the crowd despite the complaints around him. His expression changed after he took a look. There were about seven holes half a meter in diameter drilled into the land in front of him. Their walls were shiny and slick. The earlier pungent smell had indeed come from these tunnels.

“He was just walking in front of me and just like that, he disappeared. I thought my eyes were playing tricks on me, so I blinked, and there was this huge hole in the ground.” A young man beside him was talking animatedly, his face flushing red as he got near the climax of the story, “It’s that one over there. The rest of the holes appeared later on. I was so scared when its head popped out after it drilled that last hole. I think it’s a mutated earthworm, but what could it have eaten to become so big?”

His animated storytelling had attracted a crowd of listeners.

Two military jeeps pulled up and a team of eight armed policemen in full protective gear got out of the cars and walked over briskly. Luo Yuan noticed that two of them were holding military grade flamethrowers.

The squad leader spoke through a hailer with a serious expression, “It’s very dangerous here. Everyone move 100 meters away!”

The crowd buzzed and dispersed at once. Some people ran towards the outskirts of the residential area, but most of them stayed close enough to watch from afar. Luo Yuan pulled both Huang Jiahui and Wang Shishi into the car and didn't stop until they were 200 meters away.

The police squad had already isolated the zone with yellow tape while snipers and heavy machine gunners were climbing nearby buildings to get to their firing points. It was evident from their apple-pie order that the policemen were used to such operations.

When everyone was in position, two policemen moved towards the openings of the holes cautiously, holding grenades.

The atmosphere became charged at once. There was pin-drop silence all around as some people withdrew even further, unable to bear the tension.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Dull booms were heard as the third crate collapsed under the grenade's detonation. The ground quaked suddenly and a mound appeared, a sliver of something huge popping out the next moment.

A purple snake-like creature around 7-8 meters long wiggled into the air, causing fear and panic to everyone watching. Screams were heard from the crowd while most people were stunned motionless.

Judging by the creature's form, it had to be an earthworm magnified hundreds of thousands of times. Slick liquid dropped from its smooth skin, turning the sand into mud once it touched the ground. Everyone looked nauseous.

The surrounding policemen had an entirely different mentality though. They were only stunned for a short moment before the snipers began firing.

The earthworm was quickly shot to pieces.

Heavy machine guns and flamethrowers joined the battle as bullets rained on the earthworm.

The compressed flamethrower was a sight to behold. Two streams of flame assaulted the earthworm, causing it to catch fire at once. It seemed that it wasn't that dangerous after all. It did not even struggle before succumbing to its death.

In barely two minutes time, the exposed part of the earthworm was lying motionless.

Several armed officers dropped their weapons and hopped on the jeeps. The squad leader signaled and two men drove while another two took out ropes and hooked one end on the jeeps and the other on the earthworm's body, intending to pull the worm out of the hole.

They had only pulled around two meters of the earthworm out

when it ended in a bloody wound.

This section of the worm's body was around 10 meters long, but for an earthworm about half a meter in girth, this length did not even constitute one-third of its body. An officer ran towards the hole to check. His expression suddenly changed.

The armed policemen threw another handful of grenades into the holes, yet there was no reaction. After hustling for about an hour without managing to force the mutated earthworm out, the squad of eight reminded the residents to report any problems and left.

Luo Yuan, Huang Jiahui and Wang Shishi had also gone home.

Huang Jiahui sighed and mumbled, "If there's a problem here, then I don't know where else it's safe anymore."

Luo Yuan dropped his rucksack and lit a cigarette. "Now that the residential area is not safe, it's best if you two stay at home for a few days. Especially you, Wang Shishi. Don't go out to play anymore."

"Isn't that earthworm dead?" Wang Shishi asked curiously.

Luo Yuan shook his head, "Earthworms are really strong. They won't die even if they've been hacked into several pieces. They might even grow into several earthworms. At least that's the case with normal earthworms, I can't even imagine what a mutated

earthworm would do. We're not sure yet if this creature will eat humans, so we have to be careful."

"Okay," Wang Shishi replied obediently.

Huang Jiahui seemed to be in deep thought. When she came back to her senses, she said, "What about groceries? We still have to eat."

"Don't worry about that, I'll take care of it," Luo Yuan said.

"You should be more cautious, too," Huang Jiahui said hesitantly. She was well aware that even though Luo Yuan was very nice, he could also be very stubborn.

Luo Yuan seemed to think for a while before he answered, "If the earthworm issue is not solved within a few days, we'll move somewhere else. We have two cars now anyway, so it'll be easier to move."

Huang Jiahui grumbled, "Right, thanks for reminding me. Why did you get another car? We already have one here. It might be a bit old, but it works just fine. It's wasteful to buy another one. Do you still have enough money left?"

"I did not buy this car," Luo Yuan explained.

"You stole this one, too? What if the owner finds us?" Huang Jiahui asked, lowering her voice.

Luo Yuan did not want the two of them to worry, so he said, “Don’t worry. Somebody had dumped it. It’d be a waste to leave it there, so I drove it over.”

“Brother Luo, how did you know that someone had dumped it? What if they had just parked it there?” Wang Shishi said, pursing her lips.

“Right. Aren’t you smart,” Luo Yuan scolded.

Huang Jiahui wanted to lecture him, but she gave up on the idea. After all, she had been forced to steal a car herself .

Chapter 56: Mutation

“Sister Huang, look! Brother Luo has also bought some new clothes.” Wang Shishi looked like an excited puppy. “Look how good he looks in them!”

Huang Jiahui shifted her gaze towards Luo Yuan. She would not have noticed if Wang Shishi hadn’t pointed it out. She was still distracted by the image of that mutated earthworm in the residential area earlier.

Black jacket, black pants, black shoes, a total black outfit. There were thousands of shades, but none of them could match the black color of the black owl’s feathers – a deep, mysterious, attractive shade of black. Combined with Luo Yuan’s fair, rosy complexion, his tall height and his laid-back yet edgy attitude, the black color further highlighted his handsome look and gave him a mysterious aura.

Huang Jiahui’s gaze wandered before focusing again after a while. Suddenly, she gave an unfriendly hum, “Shishi, can I sleep with you tonight?”

Wang Shishi blinked. “Sure, I love falling asleep hugging Sister Huang!”

Huang Jiahui turned her head and fumed silently. Clothes were very expensive in stores now that raw materials were in shortage. Plus, neither of them had a job. One million might have seemed like a lot at first, but it wasn’t going to last long. If they converted

it all to food stamps, they would only have 70 – 80 thousand.

Luo Yuan was a meat lover, and their daily food expenses were already more than 30 catties of food stamps. Huang Jiahui had never bought any clothes in order to save money. She had even intended to sew patches on some of her old torn clothes. Who knew he would buy clothes for himself without batting an eye. She felt wronged just thinking about it.

Luo Yuan seemed to have noticed as he smiled wryly, “Would you both believe me if I said I didn’t buy these clothes either?”

“Sure, why not. They must have been dumped by someone else and you just happened to pick them up!” Huang Jiahui said in disdain while she side-eyed him.

She was thinking, “Do I look like an idiot to you? I’d have taken your word for the car. Lots of cars are being treated like junk these days anyway. But clothes, especially this new... People would never just throw them away.”

Luo Yuan thought for a bit. He felt that he had nothing to hide anymore. It would also be a great excuse for him. “Actually, I’m evolved!” he said.

His words struck them like a lightning. Wang Shishi screamed in ecstasy while Huang Jiahui was barely able to keep her cool.

After a while, Huang Jiahui regained her composure and realized

that what Luo Yuan had said was completely irrelevant. “What does you being evolved have to do with you buying clothes?” she asked with a straight face.

“You know that evolved people have strange abilities. Some were completely useless so I felt too embarrassed to talk about it.” Luo Yuan kept talking nonsense, “My ability is useless, I can just synthesize different materials into things. You remember those black feathers, right? I synthesized them into my clothes so they couldn’t be penetrated by regular bullets. I still have some of those feathers left, I could synthesize some clothes for you guys, too.”

Huang Jiahui looked at his clothes suspiciously and realized that they were indeed the same clothes he had been wearing before. They only looked brand new because of their weird sense of beauty. Her suspicion went away at once as she exclaimed, “Why didn’t you say so earlier? This is not something bad. You don’t have to hide it from us, we won’t expose your secret.”

She didn’t look worried at all as she looked at Luo Yuan. She knew that while his ability could not help them in battle, he alone would still be more useful than 10 battle-gifted evolved humans put together. Once he was discovered by the government or the military, he would immediately be recruited. She wasn’t sure whether that would be good or bad.

She spoke to Wang Shishi seriously, “Shishi, you mustn’t tell anyone about this, okay?”

“I won’t!” Wang Shishi promised. She could differentiate between good and bad. She had already grown up.

Luo Yuan laughed, “You guys don’t have to be jealous. I was just luckier. Everyone has a chance to evolve.” As he said this, Luo Yuan took the Rampage Lizard’s meat and bloody innards out of his rucksack. “Wash these. We’ll eat them tonight!”

Huang Jiahui did not pay much attention at first. She thought that he’d just gone to the market on his way back. She was about to head to the kitchen with the meat when she asked, “Should I marinate them so we can have them tomorrow? I’ve already bought food for dinner.”

Luo Yuan stopped her instantly, “Don’t. That’s not normal meat. It’s like the green beetles we had last time. It could make you evolve. Wash it and slice it. We’ll try it out later.”

Huang Jiahui and Wang Shishi felt disgusted just hearing him.

Huang Jiahui gritted her teeth, “Okay, I’ll clean it up. Hopefully we’ll really evolve this time, because I’m not eating it ever again!”

She carried the meat into the kitchen, but came out soon after with a frown on her face. “This meat is too tough, I can’t cut it. Lend me your machete. And what’s that bloody lump? It’s already turned into goo.”

“That goo is liver. It’s the good stuff. If it were to be sold, people would probably buy it for 1,000 catties of food stamps per catty!” Luo Yuan said with a smile as he handed her his machete.

Huang Jiahui looked a little skeptical, “Really? That thing is that expensive?”

“How much does a catty of meat cost in the market now?” Luo Yuan directed the question back at her.

“About 5 – 6 dollars per catty, but it’s getting even cheaper these days,” Huang Jiahui replied.

“That’s just first level mutated meat. Second level meat is resold for 30 catties of food stamps per catty while third level costs 80 catties of food stamps. How much do you think the resale value of fourth level meat would be?” Luo Yuan asked.

“That would depend on supply and demand. If fourth level mutated beasts were rare, then people would buy their meat no matter how expensive it was,” Huang Jiahui pondered, finally understanding. “Are you saying that this is fourth level beast meat?”

Luo Yuan nodded his head and Huang Jiahui covered her gaping mouth.

“Then... then we’ll be eating away thousands of dollars a day!” Wang Shishi was shocked.

“Something like that. But both of you would probably get nose bleeds if you had too much of it,” Luo Yuan laughed.

“What’s the level of the big green beetles we ate the other day?”

Luo Yuan entertained their curiosity, “Regular green beetles are second level, guard rank green beetles are third level.”

Wang Shishi looked dumbfounded as she asked, “What kind of a creature is fourth level? You must have seen it. Right, Brother Luo?”

“It’s better that you don’t know. You might have nightmares!”

Luo Yuan could still feel fear as he thought about the dragon snake. It was as if the creature existed in a mythical world.

Of course, dragon snakes were in no way related to mythical dragons. The system typically identified mutated beasts by the names given to them by the authorities, but judging by how the authorities had also named the creature a dragon snake, it was evident that they had found a resemblance between the dragon snake and the mythical creature.

Huang Jiahui had already been suspicious when Luo Yuan had brought third and fourth level meat that could not be found in the market. The fact that Luo Yuan had now come across a fourth level creature made her even more sure of her assumption. Her voice trembled as she asked, “Did you go into the woods?”

Luo Yuan hesitated before meeting her eyes and nodding.

Huang Jiahui wanted to ask him not to go on an adventure in the woods again, but meeting his assertive gaze, her words turned into a sigh. She was suddenly worried that Luo Yuan might not return home anymore after leaving for the day.

Flustered, Huang Jiahui covered it up by saying, “I’m going to the kitchen!”

She left before she had even finished her words.

Luo Yuan understood after a moment.

Ever since he had been to the woods and escaped death, the pressure had been building on him to level up quickly to get prepared for the worst. He had already met a blue rank creature by just wandering around the outskirts of the woods. If the area spread over the whole Jiangnan Province, or the whole country even, the number of these creatures out there would probably be inconceivable.

What was more, there could already be creatures that had mutated even further.

Although Hedong City was peaceful, it was like an isolated island facing the woods that extended beyond the horizon. Anyone could predict that the city would be in grave danger down the line. Its technology could not keep up with the world’s mutation. It might even deteriorate because of it. The city’s downfall was only a matter of time.

It was better to be a dog in times of peace than a man in times of chaos.

If he could, Luo Yuan would go back to leading a 9 to 5 life like he used to before, and not struggle to survive each day like he was now.

Huang Jiahui came to the living room carrying two plates, her eyes rimmed red like she had been crying.

Luo Yuan took a glance at her and said, “Do you know what the biggest food supply for mutated beasts is?”

Without waiting for an answer, he went on, “It’s humans. The world has about 60 – 70 billions of population. Of course it might be less than a third of that now, but the number is still large. To a beast, a city looks like a giant food container. Once they can overcome its outer defense, they can have all the goodies inside. Hedong City is much safer because the military is here, but other places have probably fallen just like Donghu City. Mutated beasts will only continue to evolve and evolution doesn’t seem to be ending any time soon. Their domain will only expand over time, and if humans don’t have another tech boom soon, we will only be able to survive by mutating just like the beasts. I hope this time both of you can evolve!”

Luo Yuan’s calming voice was laced with a chill. Both girls were bothered by it. They had already chosen to ignore the chaos taking place outside and leave the memory of living in the dark like alley

rats behind them. They'd been living in peace for some time now.

The atmosphere in the living room seemed to become charged at once.

Perhaps the green beetle meat had been more disgusting, or perhaps it was because they were experienced this time around but, even though they kept frowning as they ate, none of them puked.

Barely a minute after eating though, Wang Shishi claimed to have a headache.

Luo Yuan was not really concerned in the beginning. A headache was nothing to worry about after all. However, Wang Shishi's face flushed redder as her headache got more painful before she finally fainted and fell to the floor. Just as Luo Yuan was about to lift her up, he suddenly felt goosebumps all over his body.

Chapter 57: Breakthrough

Huang Jiahui panicked as she saw Wang Shishi faint. Putting down her chopsticks, she briskly walked over. “Should we call an ambulance? She just fainted out of the blue.”

“Hold up! Don’t come near!” Luo Yuan quickly stopped the approaching Jiahui. He noticed that her hair too was floating as she walked over.

Huang Jiahui noticed the oddity of the situation and was shocked when she touched her hair. It took her a while to respond, “What’s happening? Why is our hair floating?” She seemed to have thought of something as she asked, “Is it possible that Shishi has evolved?”

Luo Yuan placed Wang Shishi down on the floor gently and nodded, “I’m afraid so! Let’s move back a little. I can feel the energy increasing incessantly. We don’t want anyone to get injured.”

Both of them moved a few meters back, but their eyes never left Wang Shishi who was still lying on the floor.

An invisible energy seemed to surround her as the air around her looked fuzzy. As the energy got stronger, the chopsticks on the table were the first to start floating in the air. The plates followed.

A few minutes later, the chairs started rocking before slowly hovering into the air.

The energy spread gradually until it reached the two of them.

Luo Yuan felt a little lighter too and was surprised to feel himself float upwards. His hair stood straight as if he'd been electrocuted, the pulling sensation on his scalp actually hurting. Looking at Huang Jiahui, who seemed even more pained, he quickly said, "Don't stay in here, head outside!"

Huang Jiahui knew she could not help much by staying so she agreed, "Alright, be careful!"

She looked pale as she moved towards the door, staying close to the wall. The moment she touched the doorknob though, the unusual phenomenon disappeared.

Everything that had been floating in mid-air dropped in an instant, plates and vases shattering as random objects and garbage were scattered all over the living room.

With a groan, Wang Shishi slowly regained her senses. When she opened her eyes, she was shocked to see the mess around the room. She turned to Huang Jiahui and Luo Yuan, who were standing further away, and asked, "What happened? Why am I lying on the floor?"

"You don't remember?" Huang Jiahui asked curiously, relieved that she had returned to normal.

Wang Shishi could only remember her awful headache before she had blacked out. Shaking her head, she asked Luo Yuan, “Brother Luo, what happened?”

“Nothing important. I have news for you though, both good and bad. Which ones do you want to hear first?” Luo Yuan replied with a smile.

Wang Shishi looked anxious as she hesitated, “I guess... the bad ones?”

“The bad news is you’re cleaning up all this mess in the living room tonight!” Luo Yuan laughed.

Wang Shishi sighed in relief. “What about the good news?” she asked, pursing her lips.

“The good news is you’re the one who caused all this mess, which means you’ve successfully evolved!” Luo Yuan said.

Wang Shishi was stunned. Noticing Huang Jiahui’s envious gaze, she suddenly felt delighted and lost her ability to form coherent sentences, “Brother Luo, you mean I... I’m now... I’m evolved?”

She still looked doubtful, as if the two of them could have been mistaken. “But I don’t feel anything different.”

“You’ll have to figure it out slowly,” Luo Yuan explained patiently. “Try to focus all your attention. Your ability should be

manipulation, something like telekinesis in movies!”

“Telekinesis? That’s awesome! It’s my favorite one,” Wang Shishi spoke excitedly. She hurriedly stared at the piece of a ceramic plate and mumbled inaudibly, yet the piece remained unmoving. Ten seconds passed.

“Don’t get too excited and don’t mumble to yourself. Focus your energy. Use your willpower to move what you want moved. Give it another try,” Luo Yuan said as he spotted the problem.

“Mm,” Wang Shishi answered with a flushed face. She took a few deep breaths with her eyes closed before opening them again to stare at the piece of ceramic. This time, it floated shakily.

However, it dropped instantly when Wang Shishi grinned happily and lost her focus.

She did not seem to mind though, and only continued to try with newfound excitement. Chopsticks, teacups, plates, books, even chairs began to float around, although that seemed to be the limit of her ability. Luo Yuan guessed that she could only manipulate objects no heavier than 10 kilograms and he was a little disappointed. However, that was only the beginning. She would probably have plenty of room for improvement.

After a few minutes, her face suddenly paled and with a stagger of her body, a plate dropped and shattered into pieces.

“Are you alright?” Huang Jiahui asked at once.

“Just a small headache,” Wang Shishi said weakly.

Huang Jiahui looked at Luo Yuan. “Will she be alright like this?”

“Shouldn’t be a big deal. She should be fine after she gets some rest,” Luo Yuan replied as he thought about it. He was inwardly guessing that her ability would most likely have to do with the ability to sense things.

Wang Shishi did recover and she felt better after a while, but she dared not try it again.

Although Huang Jiahui did not seem to mind that Wang Shishi and Luo Yuan were both evolved, her jealousy was revealed when it was time to go to bed.

“Both of you have already evolved. Why is it only me who has not?” Huang Jiahui asked disappointedly as she got out of shower.

“You can’t rush it. It’s like a lottery, it’s all based on luck. We can’t change the fact that you’re unlucky,” Luo Yuan said weakly. He was also jealous of the girl, who had evolved after only eating mutated meat twice. It was true that comparison was the thief of joy. Just luck itself was enough to frustrate someone to no end.

“Bullshit me all you want,” Huang Jiahui said as she sat by the bed and pinched Luo Yuan. Then she added, “Do you think it’s

related to someone's physique? Some people will never evolve."

She looked really anxious now. She had not cared much about evolving before because nobody else had either, but now that both Luo Yuan and Wang Shishi had evolved, she suddenly felt the pressure built inside her.

Luo Yuan was not sure what the answer to her question was. All he could do was comfort her, "I already told you, it's all about chance, and chances in this case are slim. It's all a matter of luck. Eat more next time, and you'll evolve soon enough."

Huang Jiahui looked visibly deflated at the idea of having to eat more of that disgusting meat.

"Oh right, you sleep first. I won't be sleeping tonight," Luo Yuan suddenly said as he thought of something.

"What is it?" Huang Jiahui asked, standing up.

"Inspiration. I'm gonna meditate tonight," was his reply.

"You're not obsessed, right? What's the use of meditation? Are you gonna meditate your way to immortality?" Huang Jiahui scoffed.

"Maybe," Luo Yuan murmured to himself. An image of the dragon snake flashed across his mind.

After the battle in the morning, he seemed to have had some sort of realization. Combining this with his memories, he had a premonition that that day would be breakthrough day. In order to prevent anything bizarre happening and avoid disturbing the girls' sleep, he got out of the house and headed to the residential area.

It was not even 8 p.m., yet the residential area was deserted. Nobody would dare come out at night after the commotion with the mutated earthworm in the morning. He didn't need to worry about being disturbed.

Plus, it would be unfortunate for the light blue rank earthworm to make an appearance since Luo Yuan could easily finish it off.

He chose a secluded spot and stopped there.

The place used to be a park, but now there were only stumps where the trees used to be before they had been chopped off that very morning. Luo Yuan picked a stump about half a meter in diameter and sat down on it cross-legged.

Within a few breaths' time, he had already calmed down, his mind cleared of all sorts of thoughts.

About ten minutes later, his eyes suddenly opened. A weak ray of light flashed through the night as his eyes turned murderous, an intimidating aura spreading from him. He stared straight ahead unblinkingly as if a great enemy was standing there.

The night sounds of crickets and creatures all seemed to vanish as pin-drop silence surrounded him.

He was thoroughly focused, nothing but the enemy in front of him occupying his mind.

The grave aura around him grew stronger, the veins protruding on his machete-holding arm, an invisible energy slowly growing within him. As the energy reached its peak, a crisp slicing sound accompanied by a faint blue light sliced through the night air.

His eyes widened.

“This is the feeling!”

Focusing his willpower had been the charm. In other words, it had increased his concentration and allowed him to become immersed in that particular matter.

It was usual for all sorts of thoughts or environmental factors to interrupt when a common person attempted to focus their concentration,. What might have looked like complete concentration would usually be miles away from a clear mind. However, this was not something a person could have control over.

That was also true for Luo Yuan.

The only exception was when there was a life-threatening danger. Then all thoughts would automatically merge into one to fight the enemy. When a person's mind was focused, the strength of their willpower would shine through— an illusion turning into reality.

Although Luo Yuan could not exactly face a grave enemy, he could self-hypnotize and picture an enemy as he tried to focus all his thoughts.

Once he had mastered this, the rest would be just history.

About ten minutes later, he opened his eyes once again and slashed his machete through the air. A ray of light flashed, lingering before disappearing again. The light was faint and looked like the shiny reflection of an extremely thin layer of frost while the blade of the machete looked like it had been coated with a layer of mist not unlike green smoke. It looked beautifully mythical.

With each try, focusing his willpower became easier. The light lingered longer as well. The longest was only half a second, yet it was enough to thrill Luo Yuan. Half a second was considered long during a battle as his speed would allow him to make at least 5 or 6 slashes to end the fight.

The light essence was spectacularly sharp, too. It looked like it could slice through anything, but it could only be sustained by his willpower.

To experiment, he grabbed a branch and tried to chop through a

lump of basalt in the park. As the branch hit the lump of basalt, fear rose in him and his concentration broke into pieces.

It took him more than an hour to beat this inexplicable fear, but eventually his consciousness returned to normal.

This made Luo Yuan realize that he could not perform this routine often. It would be extremely restraining as his willpower would alter his reality. Considering his 13-point Willpower, he was still not at a stage where he could use it freely.

Chapter 58: Regulations

Luo Yuan's "Specialist Knife Skill: 0" on the Attribute Board had become "Specialist Knife Skill: 1" the previous night. The side-effects were equally great though.

Restlessness, breaking out in cold sweat, the occasional anxiety, even fear of the mutated earthworm he had not been scared of previously – Luo Yuan knew that this was not normal, but he was unable to control his emotions. He had exhausted too much of his willpower the previous night.

Given his current condition, he had to give up going into the woods that day.

"Are you okay?" Huang Jiahui asked as she looked at him suspiciously during breakfast. "You look weird."

"Just a bit tired from the lack of sleep," Luo Yuan laughed dryly and switched the topic, turning to Wang Shishi, "Do you still have a headache, Shishi?"

"I was okay when I woke up, but I couldn't help but test my power again this morning. I think it got a little stronger, but my head aches again now," Wang Shishi spoke in excitement, her frown disappearing.

"Don't use your power too often. Who knows how it might affect your body," Huang Jiahui said.

Even though she spoke calmly, her tone was still laced with a tinge of mockery. Wang Shishi looked unhappy as she listened to her. She pursed her lips in defiance, but kept quiet.

It was easy for youngsters like Wang Shishi to lose their level-headedness and become arrogant once they acquired powers. While Wang Shishi did not show it, there was definitely the telltale sign.

Without waiting for Huang Jiahui to speak, Luo Yuan said strictly, “Shishi, I know it’s very exciting to acquire the power of telekinesis, but you have to use it moderately. You’re still young and your body is not fully developed yet. You need to go slow to avoid getting hurt.

Wang Shishi immediately changed her attitude upon seeing Luo Yuan’s strict face, “Got it!”

Luo Yuan softened as well, “Come to my room after the meal. I have something to tell you.”

“Okay!” Wang Shishi agreed timidly, nervousness flashing through her expression. She did not know what Luo Yuan wanted to say to her.

After breakfast, Wang Shishi hesitantly followed Luo Yuan into his bedroom.

Luo Yuan closed the door and sat by the bed. There were no chairs in the room.

“You sit down too.”

“Okay,” Wang Shishi obeyed.

“Do you know why I wanted to talk to you in private?” Luo Yuan said.

Wang Shishi blinked in worry as she said softly, “I don’t.”

“You feel different than normal people after evolving, don’t you?” Luo Yuan asked, looking at her.

Wang Shishi avoided his gaze. “No!”

“I can see it. It’s not obvious, but it’s there.”

Looking at his disappointed face, Wang Shishi panicked. Fat tears rolled down her face as she rushed to explain, “Brother Luo, I was just a little upset. I wasn’t doing it on purpose.”

“Why were you upset?”

“I think Sister Huang was wrong. Her tone was also weird. I was angry, but I didn’t say anything!” Wang Shishi spoke like she had

been wronged.

Now that Luo Yuan thought about it, he felt that he was indeed a little insensitive. A slightly more sensitive person would have recognized Huang Jiahui's mocking tone. Wang Shishi had already been rational by keeping quiet, so he gently advised, "I know Sister Huang was also wrong, but you have to understand what a normal person feels towards an evolved person. Especially when both of you used to be normal before. Don't provoke her by showing off in front of her. Learn to remain low-key. She'll be back to normal soon. If you want to show off, then come at me, okay?"

Wang Shishi laughed at this as her face brightened. "Okay."

After Wang Shishi had left the room, Luo Yuan pulled an unwilling Huang Jiahui inside and spent a while readjusting her thoughts, killing any budding ideas of jealousy.

The weather was rather gloomy.

There were not many people in the residential area that day. Luo Yuan strolled around the area and discovered a few extra holes. Two of them had mounds of soil that looked like earthworm poop. He looked into one of the holes, but it was pitch black. So much so, it looked like an endless abyss.

Soon he could not stand the stench anymore. He had to dry heave for a while before he felt slightly better.

He came across more people when he got out of the residential area and headed into a barbershop.

It had been almost three months since the last time he had trimmed his hair. It almost covered his eyes now, and that kind of length was inconvenient when he was fighting.

The few posters of beautiful women on the barbershop's wall had all turned yellow, and one of the glass doors had a big hole in it – that kind of damage was common after the mutation had started. Business was not bad, though. There were about 7 – 8 people waiting there when he entered.

Luo Yuan sat on the couch and grabbed that day's newspaper from the magazine stand. However, the chitchat next to him caught his attention before he could even start reading.

“... he killed a whole team of armed policemen. Finally, several armed forces cars came and surrounded him,” a fat middle-aged man said in a low voice.

“What happened to the guy?” an old man asked curiously.

The middle-aged man sounded impressed as he said, “He was amazing, he managed to escape in the end! He was so fast it looked like he was flying. He must have gotten injured, though. I saw lots of blood at the scene.”

“Those evolved people are great. I wonder how they manage to

evolve,” a young man in a yellow shirt said enviously.

“Probably naturally like the mutated beasts. We can only blame our luck,” the middle-aged man said regrettably. “Who knows, maybe we could evolve too in the future.”

“What were you guys talking about just now?” Luo Yuan asked as he’d only heard half the story. “How come there was conflict between an evolved man and the military?”

“You’re staying in Shuitang’s Block 12, right?” the middle-aged man asked with a smile.

“You know me?” Luo Yuan was shocked.

“We live on the same block. Maybe you hadn’t noticed, but I live on the 4th floor.” The man seemed a little embarrassed as he explained, “I used to sell insurance. I usually notice the neighbors, it’s a habit.”

That made everyone around laugh.

“We were talking about the evolved man from Lianhua Residential Area who resisted recruitment. It resulted in conflict,” the middle-aged man finally answered Luo Yuan’s question.

“I thought I’d heard gunshots in the morning. Why the sudden recruitment?” Luo Yuan asked, not giving anything away.

“Didn’t you read in the newspaper yesterday about the standard regulations on evolved people? All evolved people have to register and obey all arrangements made by the government. It’s too dangerous for normal people if these people stay here!” the middle-aged man explained.

Luo Yuan noticed the tacit expression on everyone else’s face.

Normal people both feared and admired the powers of evolved people. Nobody wanted people like that around them.

Luo Yuan had only gotten to Hedong City recently, so he had not interacted much with other people. The same went for Huang Jiahui. That was why he had not kept up with the latest news. He wanted to rush home right away and warn Wang Shishi not to expose her power.

He fought the impulse, though. It would only create suspicion if he left and headed home all of a sudden. He had to not show any signs. Things were not that urgent yet.

Chapter 59: Acute Disease

Once he looked at the newspaper, Luo Yuan realized that there were articles about evolved people in every other page. Judging by what he read, things did not look good for the evolved.

Hedong City had been on a high-pressure policy ever since the world had started mutating, but there were still robberies happening from time to time. They only seemed to increase in time as a big portion of audacious evolved people got involved in murders and rapes, even killings of policemen and men of the armed forces.

As social security issues magnified, the government lost its patience and decided to completely wipe out these kind of people.

At least that's what he had deduced from reading the newspaper, and it didn't seem like reality was far off.

Luo Yuan put down the newspaper. His heart felt a little heavier.

Others would never believe that he wasn't an evolved person and the police would definitely come knocking on his door when people realized that he was different. This made him worry because there was a real evolved person in the house. It was not that he did not approve of the government's recruitment policy or that he was worried about being dissected for scientific purposes—only an otaku would come up with something that ridiculous.

He just didn't want to lose his freedom.

The various regulations and unspoken rules made working in government sectors suffocating. This was also why he had never attended any civil service examination even though it would have been a piece of cake for his 13-point Intelligence.

Using his ability, he could survive without getting recruited. There was no need for him to commit himself to the government.

The fat middle-aged man did not leave right away after his haircut. Instead, he sat down next to Luo Yuan and spoke to him like they were close friends, "Let's leave together when you're done. That mutated earthworm scares me. We can have each other's back."

"Why did you come out at all if you're scared?" Luo Yuan was curious about his attitude. If he was that afraid, then why had he left his house in the first place?

"I didn't want to, but we don't have any rice left at home anymore. I couldn't let my wife and children starve!" The man rubbed his belly as he smiled wryly, "I just went out rashly. I thought there'd be nothing to be afraid of. It's just an earthworm after all. But to be honest, I dare not go back now."

This was when Luo Yuan noticed the bag of rice next to the couch.

"Right, so why did you come out?" The man had to be telling the truth about working in insurance. He sure could talk a lot.

“If it doesn’t even have a mouth, how can it possibly eat a person?” Luo Yuan quipped.

The man agreed, “Yeah, I don’t know what there is to be scared of. The residential area was deserted the whole morning.”

While they chatted, Luo Yuan found out that the man’s name was Huang Wei, and that both him and his wife were jobless.

Even though Hedong City was still an industrial area, the number and size of its factories could never compare to those before the mutation. The unemployment rate in Hedong City was higher than 70%. Most people were losing their jobs.

Luo Yuan’s neighborhood was still a middle to high income residential area, and most people were of a certain financial status, so they could still survive without a job. However, there were also people who didn’t have a lot of savings, and even people in debt who had to depend on relief food to get through the day.

It was almost ten by the time Luo Yuan had gotten his haircut.

Just as he was stepping out of the barbershop, a black insect about the size of a fist flew right past him.

Luo Yuan instinctively grabbed it and the insect was crushed inside his hand. He wasn’t sure if that was because of his strength or because the insect had been too fragile. Opening his palm, he

found a slimy substance on it together with the insect's carcass. He frowned in disgust.

"What is it?" Huang Wei asked curiously.

"Not sure. Just a bug. Wonder where it came from," Luo Yuan said carelessly.

Bugs like that were common these days, even at home. He had killed multiple cockroaches the size of a palm in his own bedroom and had become immune to them. They seemed to have disappeared after his Sensory Perception had leveled up anyway.

"I have to spray insecticide every day at home, but it's completely useless. I actually found a 'stringed money' about a meter long the other day while I was spring cleaning. What a scare! It took me so long to kill it." He was obviously still feeling the aftershock.

"Stringed money?" Luo Yuan asked curiously. He had never heard that name before.

"It's also called a house centipede. It's similar to a regular centipede. You must have seen it before. Maybe your house has them too," Huang Wei smirked.

As they were talking, a second insect flew by and Luo Yuan finally got a good look at it. "This looks like a mosquito."

Huang Wei paled. "You can see that it's a mosquito?"

“My vision has always been good. It’s a bit large, but I’m sure it’s a mosquito,” Luo Yuan said, his face completely serious. With his 13-point Dexterity, his eyes were like a high speed camera. The mosquito had been flying fast, but not fast enough to escape his eyes.

Luo Yuan could not believe it. Like all other insects, mosquitoes had also mutated, but their size was never this large. They were usually only about the size of a nail. Plus, it was easy to spot them, so most of them were killed on sight. This meant that mosquitoes had almost become extinct in Hedong City. Who would have known he’d see two of them that day, let alone that they’d be so much larger in size.

“What’s happening over there?” Huang Wei exclaimed.

A crowd had formed down the road. Between its gaps, a middle-aged woman could be vaguely seen having a seizure on the ground. Luo Yuan walked over briskly, a bad feeling bubbling up inside him.

He and Huang Wei squeezed through the crowd, Luo Yuan’s expression darkening when he saw the woman. She was swollen beyond human capacity. Her skin was almost translucent from expanding so much and she was foaming at the mouth – it was a frightening sight.

“What’s going on?” Huang Wei asked the bystanders in shock.

“You’ll have to ask him, I came later,” said someone, pointing to another man.

“Watch what you’re saying. She was just walking in front of me and then she fell down just like that and started convulsing. A lot of people saw it too,” a middle-aged man pleaded innocence, afraid he would get in trouble.

The woman’s breathing quickened and got harder as she panted like a wind box. Realizing that she was near death, Luo Yuan shouted towards the crowd, “Is anyone here a doctor?”

Seeing nobody come forward, a young man said hesitantly, “I haven’t gotten my medical degree, I can only perform some first aid.”

“Whatever, just look after her. I’ll go get my car and drive her to the hospital before it’s too late.”

“Alright!” the young man agreed.

Luo Yuan sprinted towards the residential area, trying to keep his speed as normal as possible. Then he got into his van and drove over.

“Coming through!” Luo Yuan squeezed through the crowd once again. When he got down from the van, he realized that the woman was lying motionless. The medical student stood aside forlornly as he saw Luo Yuan approach, “She’s dead,” he said,

“There’s no heartbeat and she’s not breathing.”

“So fast? Did you find out what was wrong with her?” Luo Yuan was surprised.

The student shook his head, “Maybe some acute disease, but I’ve never read about such symptoms.”

“Man down!” someone exclaimed.

Someone in the crowd had fallen to the ground in a fit of spasms. At first, he was able to moan, but when his body started to swell, he lost his voice and foamed at the mouth with wide eyes.

The crowd buzzed, panic filling the atmosphere.

“It’s contagious, get away!” somebody advised before running away quickly.

The crowd dispersed at once as everyone’s expression darkened and turned scared. The medical student, who had touched the woman earlier, went pale as a sheet and ran away like crazy.

Chapter 60: Critical Situation

Jumping to conclusions was simply human nature. Once a contagious disease had been mentioned, scenarios of sanitizing, quarantine, and even death immediately filled people's minds. Sometimes fear could be scarier than the actual threat.

Within just a few seconds, there was no one in sight. Luo Yuan was left standing there with a frown on his face.

He was not afraid of contracting the disease, but he had seen a mutated mosquito hovering near the man's back when he'd collapsed. He walked towards the struggling, dying man and turned his body over to take a look at his back, ignoring any disgust he was feeling.

A purplish red bump the size of a fist had formed on his already swollen neck. A stream of black blood slowly flowed out of a red dot in the middle of the bump.

"It looks poisonous!" Luo Yuan's face turned grim.

These mosquitoes were obviously not like the mutated mosquitoes in Hedong City. They had probably come from the woods, which would explain how they'd appeared all of a sudden. The military could handle larger beasts, but they would never have noticed, or even managed to control, insects the size of a fist. The whole defense of Hedong City was like a sieve to these tiny creatures – it could not prevent them from getting in.

Plus, they were too poisonous, which did not match the principle of evolution. No creature, even those at the top end of the food chain, would waste food by poisoning their victim. This would devastate the whole food chain and all species would eventually become extinct. Nature was self-balancing; once one of its links was destroyed, it would cause a chain reaction that would result in devastating repercussions.

It would make sense if the mosquitoes had come from the woods though. Then the poison would only be deadly towards humans. If their prey was a mutated beast, the effect would most likely be similar to a human being bitten by a regular mosquito. However, humans were not mutated beasts, they were too fragile. Poison that would only cause a numbing sensation to mutated beasts could be lethal against humans.

A piercing scream came from afar as a chilling breeze blew past Luo Yuan.

He woke up from his trance, got into his van and drove towards the nearby food market.

At first, there were still people running around helter-skelter, but within a few minutes of driving he could only see bodies on the ground, some of them still struggling while they seized and moaned.

He avoided the bodies carefully along the way. Along several kilometers of journey Luo Yuan came across no less than a hundred bodies.

The van came to a halt in front of the food market.

The guards were just about to close the doors when Luo Yuan jumped off his van and shouted, “Hold up! I want to buy some rice!”

“We’re closing, buy it tomorrow!” a gangly, rather dark-skinned guard said. He looked worried as he signaled for the guards around him to pull down the roller shutter.

Luo Yuan accelerated, holding up the steel slat forcefully before the guards could shut the roller shutter completely. “Come on, Brothers. This will only take a few minutes. If you’re fast, maybe even less than a minute.”

“What are you doing?” The tall, thin guard had been caught off guard. One moment the guy was getting off his car and the next he was already holding up the roller shutter.

“There isn’t enough food at home anymore, what with the things happening outside. You guys should know. Without food, my whole family’s gonna die of starvation.” The guards were armed, and Luo Yuan did not want to cause any trouble, so he took a stack of 100 catties of food stamps out of his pocket and thrust them through the gap of the roller shutter without even looking, “Please make an exception, Brothers.”

The gangly guard picked up the stack of food stamps and counted them – there were 18 of them in total. It would be a lie to say that

he was not affected.

He might be working for the government but he was just extra personnel. Of course there were some side-benefits but it wasn't much. It was barely enough for him not to starve. He had never seen this much money, but he hesitated, thinking of the mysterious deaths outside.

“Sir!” an older guard could not help but voice out when he saw his team leader hesitate. Money made the world go round. That was how the saying went.

The gangly guard came back to his senses once he saw the wishful expression on his subordinates' faces. “How much do you want?”

Luo Yuan did not want to appear greedy, “Five packs of 50-catty new food.”

The guards' eyes shone. Two hundred and fifty catties of food would cost at most 375 catties of food stamps; the leftover 1400 food stamps would all be theirs.

“You guys bring some packs over, quickly!” the gangly guard ordered. The market operated on a quota basis, but anyplace managed by humans always had its loopholes. They were the market's guards after all. As long as the request wasn't too big, they still had certain privileges.

“Yes, sir!”

Several buff guards rushed to the warehouse and brought the five packs over, pushing them towards Luo Yuan through the gap under the door.

Luo Yuan dragged the food to the side when he saw that they were about to close the door. “Wait!”

The gangly guard was immediately on alert. He quietly pulled out his pistol while the others followed suit. “We’ve already given you the food, what else do you want?” he asked in a low voice.

Luo Yuan could sense everything that was happening behind the roller shutter; he pulled out another 6 pieces of 100 catties of food stamps and passed them through the gap generously, “Don’t misunderstand me, my friends. It was my pleasure working with you. I hope there’s a next time.”

Under the circumstances, nobody knew when the crisis was going to end. If the situation got more critical, this amount of food would not suffice. While these guards were not powerful figures, they could make a hell of a difference during hard times.

The gangly guard was obviously stunned by the amount of money handed over. He had never dealt with such a situation in his job, but he reacted fast, “Sure, I definitely consider you a friend. My name’s Zhou Feng. Come find me next time you want to buy food.”

“I’m Luo Yuan. See you next time.”

Luo Yuan shouldered one of the gunny sacks and carried two more packs of food towards the van.

He was stronger than the average person by 2.25 times. If an average person could carry 75 catties, Luo Yuan could carry around 170 kilograms, which equaled 340 catties. Five packs of food only weighed 250 catties, which was nothing for him.

Luo Yuan headed to the wet market. It was already closed and nobody was willing to open the doors for Luo Yuan, no matter how hard he tried to persuade them. The people inside had obviously been frightened by the deaths outside.

Luo Yuan could break in if he wished, but he was not ready to face the repercussions. Armed guards aside, even if he did manage to come out of the wet market unharmed, he would still attract the attention of the Hedong City Agency of Violence, and that made him think twice.

Luo Yuan drove back to the residential area and carried the food up to the third floor. A strong sour stench welcomed him when he opened the door.

“Why are you so late?” Huang Jiahui looked relieved to see Luo Yuan unharmed as she closed the door quickly. “I heard there was a malignant infectious disease spreading outside and a lot of people died.”

“Don’t worry, it’s not infectious.” He carried all five packs of

food into the storeroom as he added, “The virus’ structure is simple and it could mutate on its own. This wave of mutation has a very limited effect on it.”

Huang Jiahui thought about it and instantly knew that he was right – flu viruses were constantly changing, sometimes up to a few times a year, but they did not have much of an influence on anything.

“Oh, I forgot! Have you both closed the windows?” Luo Yuan asked quickly.

“Yeah, we closed them a while ago. Stuffed the gaps with clothes too.”

“No need for that. The people outside died from mutated mosquito bites. It’s fine to leave a couple of gaps.”

Huang Jiahui felt goosebumps all over her body as she heard about the mutated mosquitoes. She had seen them before. They were large in size and once they bit you, a huge extremely itchy bump formed on your skin. She had seen people in the residential area scratch their skin to the point of bleeding after getting bitten. She was a little curious about it. “Getting bitten itches like crazy, but it’s not lethal, is it?” she asked.

Luo Yuan explained what he had seen outside. Huang Jiahui looked stunned as she stood there completely motionless. Her face had turned pale.

Luo Yuan did not say anything else. They checked their inventory and walked around the house, checking each corner to make sure that no mutated mosquitoes had made their way in. Then he said seriously, “This issue won’t be solved overnight. We have enough food, but there aren’t many portions of rice left. All portions will be cut in half from today onwards. We should be able to last another ten days or so.”

Wang Shishi walked out of the kitchen holding a bottle of vinegar. As her fingers moved, vinegar shot out from the bottle into the air, turning into tiny droplets. Gravity seemed to have no effect on them. She explained in a soft voice, “I’m not showing off. We don’t have a sprayer, so Sister Huang asked me to do this!”

The next moment, the drops exploded into mist.

The sour stench inside the house become even stronger.

“Stop, don’t spray anymore,” Luo Yuan stopped her with a pained look.

“What’s wrong?” Wang Shishi looked confused.

During the SARS outbreak, somebody had spread the rumor that vinegar could act as a disinfectant, and from then on, the public always thought of vinegar first anytime they were faced with a similar situation.

“I’ll explain later. Stop spritzing, it smells horrible. Come over

here!”

Chapter 61: Discarding The Corpse

Hurried knocks came from the door, “Open the door! Please! Help my wife! Please!”

Luo Yuan exchanged a glance with Huang Jiahui before standing up to take a look through the peephole. It was their neighbor who stayed directly opposite them who was knocking. They were not really friends but knew of each other’s existence. His face was filled with fear and a hint of uneasiness.

Luo Yuan guessed that his wife was probably bitten by a mutated mosquito. She would not survive it but they were neighbors after all so he had to at least go take a look. He opened the door with some hesitation and asked, “What happened?”

The man frantically said, “Hurry, hurry to my house, my wife can’t last much longer. I don’t know what happened, she was mopping the kitchen and suddenly fell down.”

He turned towards Huang Jiahui, “Close the door first. I’ll go over and have a look.”

“Okay, return quickly,” Huang Jiahui replied worriedly.

Luo Yuan kept quiet and only nodded his head.

The man paced back and forth anxiously and said to Luo Yuan, “She’s in the kitchen, please follow me quickly.”

Luo Yuan followed him to his house and into the kitchen. However, as the man neared the kitchen, he slowed down as if waiting for Luo Yuan to go ahead of him.

Luo Yuan took a look at him and felt that it was normal for a person to react this way when facing a possibly infected patient but they were spouses after all. Now that he did not even dare go near his wife, Luo Yuan's perception of the man became tainted even though he understood his rational.

As he entered the kitchen and saw the woman. She was indeed bitten by a mutated mosquito but after such delay, she had already passed away. The woman was beautiful and Luo Yuan would usually check her out when they met. However, she was swollen to the point of disfigurement now.

The mutated mosquito had obviously come from window in the kitchen as it was open and Luo Yuan saw that it was resting on the ceiling with its stomach full from all her blood. It appeared dark red in color.

The man was saddened when he saw his partner lying dead on the floor, covering his mouth as he looked anguished but still did not dare to approach her.

Luo Yuan looked at the agonized man and said fittingly, "My condolences, I'll take my leave."

"Wait!"

Luo Yuan was called after only a few steps, he turned and asked, “What else is there?”

The man looked hesitant after calling him, he was biting his tongue and he could not speak.

Luo Yuan knew what he was thinking, “You don’t have to worry, this is not an infectious disease. The culprit is that mutated mosquito on the ceiling. You’ll be okay after killing it.”

The man was shocked and speechless, raising his head to look at the mosquito and subconsciously taking a few steps back.

He saw that the window was still open and rushed to close it.

“I’ll leave first then” Luo Yuan said.

“Wait! I... I can’t kill it. Can you help me kill it?” The man called for Luo Yuan once again, earnestly asking him for help.

Although Luo Yuan only disliked him in the beginning, he was now disgusted by the man! It is true that he is stronger and killing such mosquitoes was effortless to him but the man could not possibly know that he was stronger as he is just another normal person in the man’s eyes. Shifting his own risk to another person, what was more a stranger, this guy was really something.

Luo Yuan thought about it and let it go. The man's wife just died, he should not hold any grudges against somebody like this. He nodded his head, "Alright, pass me the broom."

"Sure! Sure! Thank you so much!" The man thanked him profusely and walked out of the kitchen to fetch the broom.

After Luo Yuan received the broom from him, he climbed up the cabinet as the ceiling was a little high. The mosquito, being full from all the blood, was extremely slow in reacting and had only wanted to fly away when the broom neared it but it was too late. With a slap, the ceiling was left with a splat of blood.

"Thank you so much. If it wasn't for you, I wouldn't know what to do." The man breathed a sigh of relief and said sincerely.

"Save the courtesy. If there's nothing else, I'm leaving." Luo Yuan jumped off the cabinet and said, dusting off his hands.

"I still want to ask for another favor." The man quickly said seeing that Luo Yuan wanted to leave.

Luo Yuan halted his step, intending to see what else the guy could ask for.

The man said mournfully, "Huiqin died so horribly. I want to keep her longer with me but I can't have her here any longer. In this current weather, her body would start to rot and smell within half a day..."

Luo Yuan looked at his absolute heartbroken face but could not tell how much sincerity was actually in his words. He cut in and asked, “You mean...?”

The man said awkwardly, “I...can you help me carry her body downstairs?”

Luo Yuan gave up on the man and said emotionlessly, “If you’ve got no guts to go down, I can’t say anything. It’s only normal for people to be afraid of the mutated mosquitoes. But she’s your wife after all. You want to discard her body right after her death and want me to do it for you. Do I look like an idiot to you?”

Luo Yuan turned to leave after his words, not bothering to give a second glance towards the man.

The man was shocked, embarrassment and humiliation washed over him. He opened his mouth to speak but realized that Luo Yuan was long gone.

Huang Jiahui was washing the rice in the kitchen as Luo Yuan returned and went in to wash his hands.

“What’s going on opposite us?” Huang Jiahui asked.

“Nothing much. I’m just disgusted! Let’s not talk about him!” Luo Yuan said while shaking his head.

Huang Jiahui stopped asking after seeing his response.

Not long after, Luo Yuan's sensitive hearing picked up a dull thud from outside. It sounded like something heavy had dropped. His expression changed slightly, and he thought to himself that the man could not have thrown his wife's corpse from the third floor.

The dishes from this afternoon were much simpler to clean. A small plate of pickled mustard and two salted eggs. These were bought by Luo Yuan before the mutation had happened. He had stocked up a lot of non-perishable items like these and still had some leftover.

The mutated meat Luo Yuan brought home yesterday was marinated but considering that difficult days like these would not end quickly, now was not the time to eat it.

They used to have a good portion of meat and fish in their meals but they did not have much appetite for the moment. Wang Shishi even stopped eating after only a few mouthfuls.

A jeep stopped by their residential area that evening. Two armed police covered in protective gear from head to toe came down with flamethrowers on their backs and two trails of fire which were about ten meters long blazed through the empty spaces around Shuitang. Luo Yuan could see numerous mutated mosquitoes falling from midair as their wings were burnt by the fire.

The flamethrowers could only last so long though and after about ten minutes, the gas on the backs of the policemen ran out. They

still had not finished clearing the residential area. If they wanted to 'spring clean' the whole Hedong City, the amount of gas needed would be an astronomical figure. If all the gas in Hedong City were to be spent here, it is possible that it would still not be enough.

Chapter 62: Food Insufficiency

It was already seven days after the appearance of the mutated mosquitoes but the situation was not getting any better. The whole city was like a ghost town and nobody could be seen on the streets.

“Mom, I’m very hungry!” A fat kid of about five years old said pitifully.

“Be good, my little Yu, and wait a little longer as it is not dinner time yet!” Yu’s mom responded.

“But I didn’t eat any rice during lunch! I’m so hungry that my stomach hurts!” The little boy, Yu, said bitterly while he was playing with his remote-control car which had now run out of battery.

The eyes of little Yu’s mom turned red and she looked at Huang Wei. He sighed and nodded saying, “alright, go cook then. We’ll sleep earlier tonight.”

“Oh! Finally, I can eat!” Little Yu threw the remote-control car aside and jumped for joy.

Little Yu’s mom sighed, stood up, walked to the almost empty rice bag and scooped a small cup of rice. Then, after some thought, she poured half of it back before she went to wash it in the kitchen. After she put the rice on the wok, she added in three large bowls of water, started the gas, and began cooking.

After half an hour, she scooped three bowls of porridge and put them on the table. She weakly uttered, “it’s time to eat.”

As Huang Wei and his son walked over, he noticed the porridge on the table was as clear as water. He asked in surprise: “Do we not have any rice left?”

“We only have about five scoops left and we don’t know how long this situation will last.” Little Yu’s mother sighed heavily while she replied and continued, “We should save as much as we can now.”

Huang Wei nodded in disappointment. Fortunately, they had bought a packet of rice weighing about 20 catties prior to the incident. They thought the chaos would end soon but instead the number of mutated mosquitoes increased every day.

Other than the first few meals of rice the three of them managed to have at the beginning, they had been eating porridge every day. Even a person with a strong body cannot survive over a long period of time solely on porridge. It was only the fifth day so far, but only their son was still about the same size. Both of them had clearly lost weight. Sadly, their rice grains were also depleting soon.

Little Yu was slurping the porridge and had forgotten all about his toy. Even for a kid who is very particular about food, he enjoys anything edible when he is starving.

As he looked at his son who was gulping down the porridge

which was still hot, he kept silent for a while and said, "I'll try to borrow some food from Mr. Wang opposite us!"

"Do they still have rice?" Little Yu's mom asked.

"They should have since they managed to buy a lot before the incident. I think they'd still have some. I'm also quite close to Mr. Wang. If we can't borrow, maybe we can buy some even though the price is high." Huang Wei comforted them though he himself was not certain. After all, it was not the good old days and food today was more expensive than gold as it was more scarce and necessary for survival. Nobody would lend food to you unless you are their relative or their friend.

He and Mr. Wang actually just got to know each other as he used to sell him insurance. Mr. Wang might be annoyed with him now since he had lost all his money in insurance now that there are no insurance companies around anymore. Huang Wei was weighing the personal gains and losses as he thought more about when he wanted to request for help.

He blew gently towards the porridge to cool it down before quickly swallowing it into his stomach. As he ate, he felt even hungrier. His stomach was growling and rumbling with pain. He touched his disappearing belly which he used to try hard to lose, stood up slowly and said: "I'll go opposite and ask."

He walked to the wardrobe to put on a raincoat and a pair of boots. Then, after some thought, he wore a helmet as well although he was unsure if it could protect him from the mosquitoes.

“Please be careful. Come back quickly!” Little Yu’s mom said worriedly.

“It will be alright. The government’s campaign vehicle said that those mutated mosquitoes can’t bite through a raincoat.” Huang Wei smile insincerely, took a deep breath, opened the door and closed it as fast as he could.

He looked around the corridor carefully and when he found that there were no mutated mosquitoes, he walked quickly to the house opposite his and knocked on the door gently saying, “Mr. Wang, are you home?”

After about 10 seconds, a reply came from the inside, “Who is it?”

“Mr. Wang, it’s me, Huang Wei from the opposite you!” he quickly replied.

“Why aren’t you accompanying your wife and son at home? Aren’t you afraid of being bitten to death by those mutated mosquitoes?” Mr. Wang said with a teasing tone but he did not seem to want to open the door.

Huang Wei was lost for words. After hesitating for a few seconds, he found the courage to say, “I was forced to... We no longer have rice and we have been eating porridge for a few consecutive days. I’m here to buy some rice from you. At a good price of course.”

Mr. Wang's wife suddenly entered the conversation and she asked in a low voice, "What does that Huang Wei want from you?"

"He said he wants to buy some rice, shall we sell him some?" Mr. Wang whispered.

"Why should we? We don't have enough ourselves. Who knows how many days such conditions will last? If we don't have rice by that time, what shall we eat?"

They argued for a while and Huang Wei anticipated bad news.

"Huang Wei, I understand that you won't borrow rice from us if you don't really need it but we don't have much rice too as we have four family members who need to eat every day. I'm sorry, why don't you try to ask someone else? I'm so sorry!" Mr. Wang said embarrassedly.

"Oh, it's alright, it's alright. I understand that you have your problems as well." Huang Wei said insincerely again.

He stood there for a while, sighed and walked back to his house. As he was about to take out the keys to open the door, he heard the conversation inside and stopped moving.

"When will dad come back with borrowed rice?" His son asked in a clear voice.

"Soon, then we can have a nice meal."

“Can I have the rice instead of porridge?” his son asked with hope.

“Sure!” his wife paused and continued, “but only for a meal.”

“Oh, that’s great! But why isn’t dad home yet?”

He slowly squatted down while leaning against the wall and sighed. Then, he stood up abruptly and went upstairs. He did not believe that out of the many people in this building, nobody would sell him some.

“150, 151, 152...”

Luo Yuan was doing push-ups in the living room and his speed was so fast that he can do about 5 push-ups a second. Sweat was dripping down his back and his fair skin appeared to be coated with a layer of oil. He still kept going like a flawless speedy yet accurate machine.

His back muscles were like the two wings, contracting and relaxing along with his actions which also pulled other long and narrow muscles together forming a dense muscle network.

Wang Shishi was standing at the corner and watched Luo Yuan secretly. As she was in her adolescent period, she was curious but felt shy. Additionally, the sounds which occasionally came from Luo Yuan’s bedroom further intensified her curiosity. She took a

deep breath, rolled her eyes, and walked into the living room boldly to Luo Yuan's side while trying to act normally.

At that moment, Luo Yuan stopped. He was panting heavily, grabbed a towel to wipe his sweat away and wanted to take a bath.

“Brother Luo, aren't you doing push-ups anymore?” Wang Shishi stared at Luo Yuan's body and acted like she was surprised.

“No!” Luo Yuan was panting so heavily that he could not speak. This high intensity training tested his stamina and he was already exhausted in less than a minute. However, considering he went from 170 fast push-ups at the beginning to 200 times now, he has already shown a slight improvement.

The best training method for him was to do short distance sprints which will lead to heavy panting like a dog after a few seconds. However, it was still daytime and someone would notice him even though there weren't any people on the street. Thus, he dared not practice sprinting on the street or he might be seen as a mutated person and get into trouble.

His stamina was the restraining factor to all his status points. His body was like a machine with a flaw since it could only work at full power for less than a minute, thus limiting his abilities. Because of this, it did not matter to him whether it was day or night, as long as his physical strength recovers he will continue training his stamina.

Though the mutated mosquitoes outside threatened the life of

normal people, they were not able to go near a person who had already mastered sword fighting. Once he entered the state of combat, his surrounding would become very quiet and all the insects would retreat. Occasionally, some unlucky mutated mosquitoes might go too near and later find themselves lying on the floor.

After successfully controlling his powers before, he basically spent his nights outside every day. Even though the blazing light from the blade of the Zhanmadao was surprisingly powerful, it could not help much in actual battles due to his current constraints because nobody would give you enough time to focus your power in an intense battle!

Though he managed to kill the huge lizard, it was mainly down to luck. After all, it was dizzy and fell on the floor as it was hit by the high explosive bomb and grenade which gave Luo Yuan a good opportunity to attack it. However, if it could dodge Luo Yuan's attacks, his rhythm would be interrupted and he would not be able to focus anymore.

Therefore, what Luo Yuan needed to do was to shorten the time taken to focus from more than 10 seconds down to only a second so that he can control his power at any time. However, maybe this was all wishful thinking. Luo Yuan felt disappointed with the results of his training even though he had been practicing for a few days.

Chapter 63: The Sequela

“What smells so good? What’s sister Huang cooking in the kitchen?” Luo Yuan asked.

“Lean meat porridge with century eggs because the meat is too salty! She added too much salt last time when she was preserving it.” Wang Shishi replied.

“Oh, she added in the level three mutated animal’s meat? No wonder it smells so good!” Luo Yuan said.

Huang Jiahui’s culinary skills were not comparable to Zhao Yali’s. Huang Jiahui was only familiar with cooking edible dishes. As he thought of Zhao Yali, he felt sad as he did not know what had happened to her. She probably might have....

“Brother Luo, as we still have some time before we have our meal, can you please do me a favor?” Wang Shishi asked sweetly.

“What is it?” Luo Yuan recovered from his thoughts and asked.

Wang Shishi had a glance at the kitchen and whispered to Luo Yuan, “I won’t tell you until you come to my room!”

Luo Yuan did not suspect anything odd and nodded his head in agreement. It was the first time he entered her room. It looked very ordinary as there weren’t many things available to fulfill a young lady’s hobby at this point in time. The decorations were

about the same as what they had when they initially rented the house. There was only an additional grey colored bear at the head of the bed and nobody knows where she got it from.

After Luo Yuan entered the room, Wang Shishi closed the door in a guilty manner. As she lowered her head trying to disguise her embarrassment, she walked towards her closet and opened it. When she stood up, she was holding a white and a pink brassiere.

When Luo Yuan saw what she was holding, his heart pounded and he felt awkward.

Wang Shishi was no longer the little girl he first met. During this period, she had grown about 5 inches taller and her body had also started to grow. Though her breasts were not large enough yet, it was getting more noticeable that she had matured into a young lady.

Wang Shishi glanced at Luo Yuan and whispered shyly, “I have worn these brassieres for about half a month but it has started to wear off. It’s a waste of money to buy a new one. Can you please help me fix them?”

“Don’t worry. We can afford to buy new ones. Besides, your... umm... the shape is not fixed yet. It will still grow and we will have to change it again at that time.”

“The quality of a purchased one is incomparable with the specially made one. I used to touch sister Huang’s, it was so smooth and had good aeration which made it feel so comfortable. I

like the color black. Can you help me make one?” Wang Shishi said with a hint of jealousy.

Luo Yuan was having a headache as he did not know how to reject her.

After they knew Luo Yuan was an evolved person, he had made a set of blue level clothes for them. But Huang Jiahui received more than Wang Shishi as she also received two extra white level brasseries. How could any fabric be compared to a blue level mutated animal’s feather? Luo Yuan only used one or two feathers to make them and after that Huang Jiahui never wore other brasseries anymore. He did not think that Wang Shishi would want them too.

“This seems to be inappropriate. After all, these are your private things, how can I touch them?” Luo Yuan finally thought of a reason.

“Brother Luo, I don’t mind and why should you?” Wang Shishi braced herself, stared directly into Luo Yuan’s eyes and said, “I won’t tell sister Huang.”

“She’ll find out eventually even if you don’t tell. Unless you stop drying your clothes from now on!” Luo Yuan smiled wryly.

“Otherwise what can I do? Should I beg sister Huang?” Wang Shishi smirked as she saw Luo Yuan felt embarrassed.

“Alright, just give it to me then!” Luo Yuan did not want to make a fool of himself.

Wang Shishi chuckled and handed her brassieres over to Luo Yuan. He hurriedly put them into his pocket and wanted to leave the room.

Wang Shishi uttered again, “Don’t go yet, I still have underwear! Brother Luo, please also help me to improve them. Please!”

Since Luo Yuan already agreed to help, he did not reject her. He crumpled up the two underwear and put them into his other pocket. He then briskly walked out from Wang Shishi bedroom.

As Luo Yuan entered his bedroom, he felt relieved. He took out the brassieres and underwear from his pockets. The white underwear of hers looked tiny and seemed to have a fresh and soft fragrant.

He felt as though he was somehow a pervert so he put down the underwear and walked to his closet. He opened one of the drawers which was about half-filled with the feathers of a black owl. As he had already used up quite a lot of feathers, there were now only a few left. Most of the feathers were obtained from the tail of the owl.

He chose some of the shorter feathers but when he wanted to stand up, he heard a sound. It was the sound of his bedroom door being opened. To his sensitive ears, it sounded like an explosion!

He shrugged and quickly stood up. As he rushed to his bed, the bedroom door was pushed open and a shadow came in.

At that very moment, Luo Yuan's hands were moving so fast that it became blur for a while and when it became clear again, the underwear on the bed had already disappeared "magically".

Huang Jiahui's hair was blown slightly by the wind. Normally, she would realize something strange in the room as she used to be a police. However, she was not being observant at that moment. Huang Jiahui quickly closed the door and blushing walked over to Luo Yuan. She sat by his side and then bashfully, she grabbed Luo Yuan.

With her obvious hint, if Luo Yuan still did not understand what she was up to, his 13-point Intelligence would have to have been added to a dog. But Luo Yuan knew that Wang Shishi's undergarments were hiding under the quilt. He would feel ashamed and even embarrassed if they were found by Huang Jiahui. Furthermore, he would never able to explain to her what happened. So, he said, "Not now. Wang Shishi is not asleep yet. Furthermore, we are having dinner soon. Let's talk about it later."

"But you are leaving later tonight. Tell me, how many days have you been out?" Huang Jiahui said with discontent.

As Luo Yuan went out every night, both of them were not on the same bed for more than a week. She had her suspicions that Luo Yuan went out to find another woman instead of practicing his knife skills.

“How come Wang Shishi isn’t asleep yet?” Luo Yuan suddenly said as he had run out of ideas.

She became more dubious as Luo Yuan kept looking for a reason to avoid the situation. After all he was quite passionate at first and he wanted it almost every night. She needed to beg him for him to stop. If he had not found a new sweetheart, he would not be so cold and keep rejecting her offer.

“It’s alright if she hears!” Huang Jiahui’s doubts within her made her ready to risk everything. She pushed Luo Yuan down, rode on his body and forcibly removed his pants while she said coldly, “It isn’t her first time hearing us. And I won’t be surprised even you went to sleep with her. You’ll still have to do it today even if you don’t want to!”

Recently, Wang Shishi had kept tempting and luring Luo Yuan. Though she tried to cover up her act, it was too immature to conceal from a mature and experienced woman. Furthermore, Huang Jiahui is proficient in criminal psychology.

Luo Yuan innocently looked at his pants being pulled down and his energized “little thing” sprung out! He could not help it and said, “Can you please not slander a good man? How can I do that to Wang Shishi who isn’t even 14 yet?”

“Don’t think that I don’t understand what you men are thinking! Don’t you men like young and youthful bodies?” Huang Jiahui thought of her unfortunate family and teased. Her actions also

started becoming more aggressive.

As Luo Yuan thought of some indecent scenes, his “little buddy” extended slightly and seemed to get even more excited. Then, he said with a stern voice, “Those men are losers! They are crazy! You can’t just judge every man like this. I prefer a mature woman!”

Huang Jiahui looked at him with her watery eyes and suddenly she bent over him and licked the the tip of his lower body lightly.

Luo Yuan drew a cold breath and a shiver ran down his spine. He uttered faintly, “Don't!”

Seeing the response from Luo Yuan, she seemed to be more determined. She smiled charmingly and wrapped her sultry lips around his “little buddy”.

In just a few seconds, Luo Yuan’s “little buddy” was throbbing. He struggled for a while but soon ejaculated!

It was too late for Huang Jiahui to react and she was forced to swallow most of the semen. Some even choked her. She kept coughing until tears came out of her eyes. She rushed to the washroom and came out a few minutes after. She asked dubiously, “Why was it so fast?”

“I...” Luo Yuan was speechless.

That was the reason why he did not want to sleep with Huang

Jiahui. It was too difficult to explain.

In actual fact, it was because of his agility. Since his agility reached 13-points, his neural reflexes were also enhanced. Thus, he had faster speed, better eyesight and sharper hearing. His skin had also become very sensitive.

Even in a confined environment, his skin can feel the slightest of changes in the air particles. Something which would cause only slight pain to a normal person would be amplified to him and his “little buddy” is the most sensitive region for a man. Even when there was some friction against his underwear during exercise, it would already affect it tremendously. Huang Jiahui was so aggressive that it was impossible for Luo Yuan to hold back. As soon as he relaxed, he ejaculated.

When Luo Yuan wanted to simply make up a reason, there was a sudden knock on the door outside!

Chapter 64: The Collapsing Social Order

“It seems that somebody’s here. I’ll go get the door!” Luo Yuan said. He stood up, pulled up his pants quickly and walked out of the bedroom while Huang Jiahui stared in confusion at him.

Luo Yuan opened the door and was shocked: “You are...Huang Wei?”

No one can blame Luo Yuan for second-guessing because Huang Wei’s appearance had changed so drastically. A week ago, he was a fat guy but now he had the body of a model, the only exception being his pale face that made him look very weak.

Huang Wei did not think that Luo Yuan would just open the door for him without checking first. He had been begging all the other neighbors and it was his first time enduring such a shameful situation. Though he did not see any mutated mosquitoes at the corridor, he still went into the living room quickly to avoid causing any trouble to Luo Yuan. He took off his helmet and tried to offer a smile, “Yes, yes! We had our hair cut together. I’m surprised that your memory is so good!”

“What do you need?” Luo Yuan closed the door and asked directly although he had already guessed what he wanted.

Huang Jiahui came out from the bedroom and her face was still blushing slightly. She took a look at Huang Wei and asked Luo Yuan, “Your friend?”

“I met him a few days ago. This is Huang Wei, our neighbor who’s staying upstairs!” Luo Yuan then pointed at Huang Jiahui and introduced her, “This is my girlfriend, Huang Jiahui!”

It was the first-time Luo Yuan introduced her as his girlfriend. Huang Jiahui was so excited that she grinned, “Since you’re Luo Yuan’s friend, just make yourself at home. Have you eaten? Would you like to have a meal with us? I’m sorry that we don't have much to offer, we just have some porridge.”

“No, it’s okay. Thank you very much!” Huang Wei was overwhelmed by the unexpected politeness. His eyebrows were now relaxed but as he heard that they were also eating porridge, he was slightly disheartened.

Apparently, they did not have much food too. He was hesitant but as he thought of his starving wife and son awaiting his return with rice, he sighed deeply and said with guilt, “I...sigh... I came here today wanting to buy some rice from you as our rice is finishing soon. Money is not a problem. Five to ten times more expensive than normal is alright with me. If you’re not satisfied, I can pay more too!”

“Don't mention it!” Huang Jiahui smiled while replying politely.

Luo Yuan was afraid that Huang Jianhui would overpromise out of courtesy so he interrupted her and asked, “How much do you want?”

Huang Wei was shocked and relieved. His lips were trembling

slightly and when he recovered, he uttered: “I don't want too much. I am only looking to buy about 10 to 20 catties.”

“It'll be very inconvenient for us if I sell you 20 catties.” Luo Yuan replied even though he found it difficult to say. Then, he nodded and said, “Make it 15 catties then. I'm not a person who takes advantage of others as everyone has their own times of trouble too. Regarding the price, just pay me according to the original price. Jiahui, please go to the storeroom and take out 15 catties of rice!”

Huang Wei briefly reflected on the situation at hand right now. A person who he just met once seemed to be better than a neighbor who he had known for years. Unsurprisingly, he was very grateful and touched.

Huang Jiahui was in a state of shock. She took a few steps and asked curiously, “15 catties?”

Huang Jiahui thought she might have heard it wrongly. Were they not friends? Besides the fact that he was still asking for compensation, the amount of rice he offered made him look stingy. Though she was not certain, there was at least 700 catties of rice grains in the storeroom. She herself would have been reluctant to give 100 catties but she did not mind giving about 50 catties to Huang Wei.

“What are you doing!?” Luo Yuan reacted in frustration and said, “go and take it quickly!”

As Huang Wei did not know the inside story, he felt touched and guilty because he was troubling his neighbors to buy rice. Therefore, he uttered, "It's alright. As you aren't having a lot of food as well, you may just give me 10 catties."

"How many days can you survive with only 10 catties of rice? Don't worry, we have enough food!" Luo Yuan waved his hands and then winked at Huang Jiahui privately.

Huang Wei felt Luo Yuan was very generous and he was so ecstatic that he was lost for words.

The main difference between a young lady and a mature woman is that a mature woman is good at reading faces. Though she could be dissatisfied or doubtful at the time, she will definitely honor the man in front of others. Huang Jiahui hesitated and walked into the storeroom. After a minute, she carried a bag of rice and came over.

The bag of rice was apparently not 15 catties but actually about 19 catties. Luo Yuan knew it as soon as he got hold of it but he did not mind and passed it directly to Huang Wei. He then explained, "These are all new grains. Forget about the small change, just give me 20 catties worth of food coupons will do."

As Huang Wei received it, he felt that the bag was very heavy. His eyes became red and he thanked Luo Yuan sincerely. He gave 50 catties worth of food coupons and did not even wait for the change and left abruptly.

Luo Yuan did not offer to give him more food not because he was

stingy but if he helped too much, it might backfire. After all, human beings are always complicated.

In fact, if you take out some rice to help people a little, they would not think that you are stingy but instead consider you generous. They will appreciate your help. However, if you give more than expected, their thoughts would change and they will feel that it is natural to receive your help. Then, if you stopped helping later, they would feel angry instead.

Being too generous can bring problems as well. Perhaps not directly from Huang Wei but others who got to know that he had so much food. They might be suspicious and have some bad intentions.

Of course, Luo Yuan was not really concerned about the life of others but he was afraid of what would happen if he rejected Huang Wei. Even if Luo Yuan did not care, he had to go out almost every night to train and both Huang Jiahui and Wang Shishi would be in danger if someone invaded their house at that time.

Although Wang Shishi was also an evolved person and nobody would be able to go near them if she used her abilities along with simple weapons such as kitchen knife, it was not about her strength but also her ability to focus as focus is important in battle. According to Wang Shishi's current mental age and strength, she might not be able to fully unleash her energy if she were in danger.

The current stabilization was because of the extended effect of the social order. This was the main reason why most people in the building were still staying calm. However, if such situations

persisted, the effect would be gradually diluted. If more and more people continued to suffer from starvation and fear, Luo Yuan could not even begin to imagine what would happen at that time.

Unfortunately, Luo Yuan's suspicions were proven right!

During the fourth noon, when Luo Yuan was having his lunch, he heard somebody cry for help upstairs which was followed with a mix of screams and shouts. The back-and-forth screaming continued on-and-off for about a minute before it eventually stopped.

That situation seemed to have ignited something because riots started happening in the building.

The brief smell of dead corpses and blood was filling the air. Luo Yuan could smell it even from his home. So far, nobody came to their unit yet but it would happen sooner or later.

Luo Yuan still went out every night to practice his knife skills. It seemed as if he did not have the slightest concern about the crisis at all.

During the day, he also started to train Wang Shishi on utilizing her powers.

He got a wrench from the storeroom, sliced off the two ends with his Zhanmadao and left it with only the handle. Then, he sharpened the tips to convert it into a weapon of about 20cm long

similar to a flying shuttle.

He intended to train Wang Shishi to be stronger because softhearted people can barely survive during crises like these. She is like a wolf who has never seen blood. Such wolves can never survive to be an adult.

When she knew that brother Luo wanted her to protect sister Huang at night, she was very excited and agreed instantly. She also moved into Luo Yuan's bedroom that particular night. That gave Luo Yuan some relief in his heart because he would no longer have to look at Huang Jiahui with remorse for not protecting her.

Chapter 65: Disappointment And Desperation

Liu Ming was rummaging through cigarette butts in the ashtray and finally picked up a slightly longer cigarette butt, lighted it up and took a puff hastily. The tobacco smoke occupied his lungs for a few seconds before he blew out a cloud of smoke. He managed to inhale only twice before the cigarette had burnt itself to the tip of its filter. After that, he reluctantly threw it away and started rummaging through the ashtray again.

His young and beautiful wife, Huang Yuying took the ashtray away from him and uttered, “Don't smoke again. You are making the house smell.”

Liu Ming snorted, “We will die eventually. Why are you trying to keep me from enjoying my life before I die?”

“Why are you speaking this way? Aren't we still alive and well?” Huang Yuying said sourly.

“Well!? How could the little food you got be enough? Don't they like you? Why did you only manage to get so little? Even if each one of them gave you only a little, it wouldn't weigh only a catty, right? Are you not satisfying them enough?” Liu Ming teased.

As he gazed at his beautiful and elegant wife, he thought of her fair body which used to only belong to him. Unfortunately, that body has now been tainted by a few men, and his heart was broken.

“Liu Ming, you bastard!” Huang Yuying’s eyes turned red as she was hurt by his words.

“Did I say anything wrong?” Liu Ming was furious and said coldly, “F*cking b*tch, how did you feel when you got f*cked by those three guys?”

“I was aroused. Are you satisfied now?” Huang Yuying screamed.

“Slap!”

Liu Ming’s anger was ignited. He stood up and slapped her heavily, “Asshole, I’ll let you have your fun.”

Huang Yuying felt so painful and dizzy. She covered her face and looked at him in shock. When she recovered, she groaned, “I absolutely regret being your wife. If you’re so brave, why don't you go and beat them instead? Isn’t it useless to slap me?”

As soon as Liu Ming slapped her, he felt guilty. He knew he could not blame her because he would have been killed if it was not for her sacrifice, humiliating herself just to protect him that night. Moreover, he also had to rely on his wife’s body to continue to survive.

“I...” He wanted to apologize but he thought of his own pride as a man and uttered something else instead, “I...I’ll definitely kill them in the future!”

While looking at her husband uttering brave words, Huang Yuying's mood suddenly turned cold and she stopped crying. She stood up abruptly.

“What are you going to do?” Liu Ming said nervously.

“Put on make-up. What else can I do?” Huang Yuying said indifferently. Then, she continued, “they should be coming soon.”

Liu Ming opened his mouth but he did not manage to say anything. As he looked at his wife entering the toilet, he pulled his hair in frustration and sighed.

Then, Huang Yuying came out. She was wearing a blue colored long dress and her fair legs were exposed. She appeared to be more gorgeous with her light makeup and Liu Ming was stunned as he has not seen his wife so beautiful ever since their marriage.

Huang Yuying sat on the sofa and adjusted her dress but just as she sat down, laughter of the men could be heard from outside.

Huang Yuying stood up nervously while Liu Ming's face was pale. Then, there was a loud knock at the door.

“I'll kick the door open if you don't open the door.”

“Why aren't you going to open the door?” Liu Ming remarked

even though Huang Yuying was already getting to her feet.

She was shocked and glanced at Liu Ming disappointedly. She seemed to have made a decision at that point. She smiled widely, walked gracefully to the door and opened the door.

The three men were wearing a raincoat and safety helmet. They entered the unit quickly and took off their raincoats.

“Sh*t, why are you so slow?” A ferocious young man was groping her and remarked unhappily.

“Brother Yu, I...I went to the toilet just now.” Huang Yuying was blushing and said timidly.

“My dear, have you cleaned yourself? You did not have sex with your weak husband today, right?” brother Yu laughed, held her head and kissed at her sultry lips.

“No, he did not dare to.” After the argument earlier, she became more daring and said flatteringly.

The three of them were shocked and then burst out laughing.

Liu Ming's face obviously became sour. He lowered his head and remained silent. However, his heart felt as though it had been bitten by a poisonous snake and was very painful.

Brother Yu could not wait, he unbuckled his belt and released his little buddy saying, “It’s suffocating, hurry up.”

Though she was completely disappointed with her husband, she did not want to satisfy other men in front of him. She blushed and said tenderly, “brother Yu, let’s go to the bedroom. It’s more comfortable to do it on the bed!”

“Let’s do it here. Come, my dear, hurry up.” He said eagerly.

“Brothers, you help yourselves... I... I’ll not disturb you. I’ll wait in the guest room.” Liu Ming could no longer see his wife being humiliated, so he stood up and gave a forced smile.

“Going away?” one of the guys asked. “Don’t. Watch us!” he added.

Huang Yuying chuckled reluctantly, “What’s this?”

“We’ll only be excited when your husband is looking. And you’ll feel the difference.” Brother Yu swayed his little buddy and laughed out loud, “Come along, be quick!”

Huang Yuying sighed and got down on her knees.

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Liu Ming was clenching his fist tightly and his eyes were

bloodshot. As he was watching his wife moan like a prostitute, his heart was pounding.

Was that his wife? The wife who used to be loving, gentle, kind and morally pure?

No... she... she was definitely a prostitute!

He could not stop himself from secretly glancing towards the bottom of the sofa where a knife was hidden. He had been checking it a few times but each time he had the courage, he thought of the consequences of failing and then decided not to act.

Ever since he was young, he has never got into a fight, not to mention murder. It did not come as a surprise that he did not take any action until the end.

Huang Yuying lied on the floor weakly, and by then tears had already rolled down her cheeks.

“It’s fun to play with a young lady. She’s more fun than the girl this morning!” The last man got up from her body, shook his little buddy which had become tired and commented.

Huang Yuying sat up slowly and said calmly, “Brother Yu, I don't want to live here anymore. I want to follow you. Would you please bring me along!?”

Liu Ming raised his head suddenly and stared at her as he thought

he heard her wrongly.

“Why?” Brother Yu was shocked too when he heard what Huang Yuying had said and thus he asked.

“I don't want to live together with a useless person.” Huang Yuying touched her face which was slapped earlier and glanced at Liu Ming disappointedly. “Provided you give me food, I'll go with you” she said.

Brother Yu squatted down and touched her lips. Huang Yuying responded by wrapping his finger with her lips, licked lightly with her tongue and looked at him seductively. He was attracted, of course, and said, “Okay, since we are lacking a cook, you may come with us!”

“Thank you, brother Yu!” Huang Yuying smiled flirtatiously.

“Brothers, my wife must be more fortunate to go with you than I am but before you leave, can you please donate some food to me? Otherwise, I'll probably starve to death here.” Liu Ming uttered worriedly.

At that moment, he did not care about his wife anymore. Since his wife had already openly betrayed him, he thought he should not miss her anymore. Furthermore, his wife wanted to leave him and he could not stop her. Thus, he wanted to make the most of the opportunity and begged for some food.

Huang Yuying shivered slightly. Though she wanted to beg them to give Liu Ming some food at the beginning, she had become indifferent and did not even want to look at him towards the end!

The three men burst out laughing and replied, “You are really the worst man ever. It would be better if we fed the dog than fed you. Let’s go brother Yu!”

And, they left.

When the door was closed Huang Yuying turned and looked at him. Her eyes were cold and indifferent like she was looking at a stranger!

Liu Ming sat on the sofa and stared blankly. After a few minutes, he suddenly smirked.

“You are leaving me to die... son of a b*tch! Hahaha...I’ll won’t let you live peacefully.”

He stood up numbly, walked slowly into the kitchen and with a furious face, he muttered, “If you want me to die, let’s die together.”

He switched on the gas, gazed at the burning flame and laughed hysterically. Then, he took a bottle of cooking oil, opened the cover and poured it all over the floor. He also took a piece of newspaper, burned it and threw it on the floor.

Chapter 66: Leaving

It was before 4 o'clock in the evening when the apartment was set on fire. Luo Yuan was getting ready to have his dinner when he smelled smoke. Without realizing what was happening yet, there was a loud explosion from downstairs.

The whole building shook, dust fell from the ceiling and thus the dishes on the table were covered with a layer of dust.

Both Huang Jiahui and Wang Shishi were so scared that their faces turned pale and their chopsticks fell on the floor.

“What is happening outside?” Huang Jiahui asked anxiously.

“Let me take a look!” Luo Yuan replied. Before he reached the staircase, he saw dense black smoke rising from a red flame downstairs. It seemed that the explosion was due to a gas pipe that burst.

Luo Yuan felt suffocated and coughed continuously. He quickly stepped back and shut the door.

Looking at both Huang Jiahui and Wang Shishi who were frightened, he said, “There’s a fire downstairs and I’m afraid that the building may be burnt down soon. Hurry up and follow me, we have to leave.”

“Argh, why is there a fire all of a sudden? Who’s so mean?”

Huang Jiahui distractedly stood up and continued, “I’ll go grab some clothes and a luggage bag.”

“Quickly, the fire has already engulfed the third floor.” Luo Yuan said worriedly.

“Argh!” Wang Shishi and Huang Jiahui were both so nervous that they were sweating. They quickly ran towards their bedrooms.

Luo Yuan turned around anxiously and walked towards the window. He smashed it open and went to the storeroom to get a big bag of rice and threw it down. After he threw down two bags, he felt that the temperature of the apartment was excessively hot so he decided to stop.

He then went into Wang Shishi’s bedroom and noticed that she was still packing her clothes. He said, “Don’t waste your time. Go, get a blanket to cover your head and follow me downstairs.”

Without waiting for Wang Shishi’s response, Luo Yuan walked directly to his own bedroom and told Huang Jiahui the same thing.

Huang Jiahui put her things down reluctantly and took a blanket. Then, her hands suddenly stopped moving and she asked, “What about you?”

Due to the hot weather, each bedroom only had one blanket. As the only blanket in the room was given to Huang Jiahui, it meant

that Luo Yuan needed to endure the burning flame without any protection. “I am an evolved person thus the fire cannot hurt me.”

Due to the limited time, Luo Yuan was not able to contemplate the effects of his special abilities. His body had suddenly appeared as several shadows as he speedily kept some important things inside his bag and held the bag in his hand.

Huang Jiahui was shocked when she saw Luo Yuan’s abnormally fast speed.

When they reached the door of the bedroom, Wang Shishi had also nervously run out with her blanket. At that moment, the whole house was already filled with the thick smoke which had a strong choking effect.

They dashed to the main door and quickly opened it to escape but the hot dense smoke gusted to their face due to the difference in air pressure. It was so suffocating that they coughed until they shed tears.

“What can we do? What can we do? We can’t go down!” Huang Jiahui said while trembling in fear.

During a fire, it was not the high temperature that was fatal. Instead, it was the emission of poisonous gases which was dangerous to our lives. Most victims die due to poisonous gases rather than the burning flame.

Under such conditions, they were unable to go downstairs. Despite Luo Yuan's super speed and abilities, he found it highly risky to save both Huang Jiahui and Wang Shishi as they could both suffocate to death from the smoke.

Luo Yuan was worried. Suddenly, an idea struck him and he asked Wang Shishi, "Can you use your telekinesis to blow away the smoke?"

"Brother Luo, I'll try!" Though Wang Shishi was coughing and tearing, she raised her head and replied.

After several days of training, her telekinesis had become a natural ability. It was as easy as controlling her limbs. When she started to exert her power, the smoke in the surrounding seemed to be swept away by an invisible power. They felt relieved.

"Well done!" Luo Yuan praised.

Seeing that she could help brother Luo, Wang Shishi smiled and was proud of herself.

"Let us try to go downstairs. Since her telekinesis can keep away the smoke, maybe it can keep the burning flame away too." Luo Yuan said.

They went to the second floor. The upper part of staircase only had dense smoke but when they turned into a corner, a strong burning flame was right in front of them. If Wang Shishi had not

maintained her telekinesis, all three of them might have been burnt alive.

Although Wang Shishi could split up the flames, there was nothing she could do about the extremely high temperature. With a temperature of more than 100 degree Celsius, the extreme heat caused their hair to curl up.

In light of this, they retreated back to the third floor.

“The temperature is too high, we cannot go down.” Huang Jiahui touched her red-hot face and said disappointedly.

“We still need to find a way. Another gas pipe may explode again later.” Luo Yuan said impatiently. He continued, “Now, there’s only one way. Shishi, give me your blanket.”

Wang Shishi has a complicated relationship with Luo Yuan. He seemed like a brother to her because he was so kind and caring towards her. However, because she was still very young, she was easily influenced by what she saw and heard. Sometimes, she would imagine that she was sister Huang and she would daydream of every single bashful scene she had with Brother Luo. In every moment, she trusted him like nobody else. She passed the blanket to Luo Yuan directly without any hesitation.

Luo Yuan took possession of the blanket, covered her and hugged her in his arms.

Wang Shishi screamed in shock. However, she realized that her body was in contact with Luo Yuan's, though separated by the blanket. She started blushing and had forgotten about the danger outside.

Then, without asking, Luo Yuan took Huang Jiahui's blanket as well and covered her up. He carried her on his shoulder even though she was screaming and complaining.

"Let go of me!" Huang Jiahui yelled. She felt sad and tried to speak even though she felt choked, "You cannot carry me, just take Wang Shishi and go, it's alright."

"Shut up." Luo Yuan was blunt in the heat of the moment. "Wang Shishi, please help me push away the smoke and the burning flame. I'll start running." Luo Yuan said.

"Got it, brother Luo. Shishi is ready." Wang Shishi suddenly felt so weak but she pulled herself together and answered with a sweet and soft voice.

Luo Yuan took a deep breath and dashed downstairs.

Fortunately, both of them were slim and the sum of their weights were less than 100kg. Though they were light and easy for Luo Yuan to carry, his body had become very heavy. He passed about five flights of stairs and each step he took made a heavy tremor that made people wonder if the staircase would collapse.

“Shishi, watch out!” Luo Yuan shouted when they were about to reach the second floor.

“Oh!” Wang Shishi gave an acknowledging reply and pushed her telekinesis to her limit. The surrounding flames seemed to get “scared” and gave way. Some of the gravel and ashes were also swept away.

The second floor was completely burnt by now. The wall was cracked, the air was hot and the temperature had already increased up to more than 100 degree Celsius. The marble floor especially, had blackened and was fragile under the extremely high temperature. A gentle step on the floor was enough to break it. Furthermore, if Luo Yuan’s shoes were not blue level, it would have melted by now.

Their shoes and clothes helped protect them from the fire. However, Luo Yuan’s body hair was quickly curling under the high temperature and his skin was also burning with pain. Along the way, he did not breathe as he was afraid that his lungs would be burnt by the hot air as well.

He ran desperately. Due to the burden of the two people with him, his speed was similar to that of a normal person. As it was not far to sprint from the third floor to the first floor, Luo Yuan took only about ten seconds to get there.

He put down both Huang Jiahui and Wang Shishi and panted heavily.

The two struggled to free themselves from their blankets and they were finding it so difficult to breathe that their faces were very red. Then, they looked at Luo Yuan who was extremely fatigued and seriously burnt that he looked like a cooked crab. Huang Jiahui felt bad when she looked at Luo Yuan but during that time Wang Shishi tiptoed and bravely kissed Luo Yuan's face. With a soft voice, she said, "brother Luo, Shishi was so scared just now."

"Did both of you get burned?" Though Luo Yuan was still in shock, he recovered quickly and asked.

"No!" Wang Shishi answered quickly.

She stared at Luo Yuan with her watery eyes and felt that the kiss was not enough for her. Her heart was throbbing fast, her face was blushing and excitedly, she thought to herself, "Finally I can kiss him. I wanted to kiss him on the lips but unfortunately, I wasn't daring enough. I should not continue to be like this, after all, brother Luo is mine too, not only sister Huang's."

Huang Jiahui felt uncomfortable and cast a furtive glance at Wang Shishi. But she said nothing because of the situation they were facing.

"Then let's go and look for a place to stay." Luo Yuan said.

"Where can we go?" Huang Jiahui asked doubtfully.

"Anywhere!" Luo Yuan looked towards the nearby residential

building.

“Do you mean other buildings? What if they don't let us?” Huang Jiahui said worriedly.

“They'll have to!” Luo Yuan took out the Zhanmadao from his bag, smile slyly and said, “Please help me with my bag. Let's go over there and have a look. I threw down two big bags of rice just now. After we find a place to stay, we should be able to survive for a few days.”

It was a long-lasting war between human beings and nature. The dead silent town had given a chance for the greens to grow wild. It was only about ten days but the greenery had already covered the entire desolate city.

The district was covered with greens and weeds that had already grown to a meter tall. There were some trees around and they stood out among the weeds while they were trying to spread their branches and leaves to fight for their own space. Somewhere in front, there were also unknown vines growing towards the upper part of a building which covered the entire building tightly like a green jacket.

Luo Yuan walked to the right side of the building and found that the two big bags of rice had disappeared. As he looked to his left and right, he saw that there were four people in raincoats not far from them and two of them were carrying bags of rice towards a nearby residential building.

Chapter 67: Villa

Luo Yuan let Wang Shishi stay behind with Huang Jiahui to protect her. After all, she had some special powers even though they weren't strong. She might not be able to fight gigantic beasts but small organisms like mosquitoes are manageable. He kept repeating some important reminders to her and then left them abruptly.

“Wait!” Luo Yuan shouted from the back of the four of them. “Hi, I’m sorry. The two bags of rice are mine” he said.

The four of them stopped moving. Luo Yuan could not see their faces clearly as they were all wearing helmets. However, he could still identify that three of them were male and one of them was female. One of the guys who looked bigger in size was trying to test Luo Yuan so he intentionally played with the knife in his hand. However, Luo Yuan continued towards them calmly.

From Luo Yuan’s response, the thug realized that he was not a weak person. He suddenly spoke politely, "Oh, you are staying in the same building as me? I can't believe we are neighbors! But... I guess the two bags of rice shouldn't be yours, right? Actually, I took it from downstairs. I will give it back to you if you can prove to me that the bags of rice belong to you. If you can't prove it, then I'd say you're probably trying to take advantages of us!"

Luo Yuan found it ridiculous and laughed, “Haha. I don’t need to prove anything to you. If I say it’s mine, then it is mine!”

“Damn! Are you an idiot!?”

“Brother Yu, shall we just kill him?”

One of the thugs almost attacked Luo Yuan but a bigger thug stopped him. He had an instinct that the guy in front of him was not someone he should challenge as he could already feel the tension between them even when he was standing quite a distance away. However, he understood that he could not lose his face after a few days of bullying. He was actually the leader amongst the four of them and he was brave enough to do anything. He had initiated all their crimes such as murder, robbery, and raping which allowed him to accumulate all his power and influence to become their leader. But the power he had was weak and easy to ruin.

“Hey friend, that’s not the right thing to do!” Brother Yu looked upset with his follower but he forced himself to smile and said, “We are not weak people. Just take one if you want, otherwise, forget about it and get lost!”

Luo Yuan turned around and looked at Huang Jiahui who was still waiting and said, “I’m in a hurry, I don’t have much time to argue with you. I’ll say it one last time, just leave it here and get lost!” The other two guys remained silent as they knew it was not a good idea to continue to argue with Luo Yuan. Other than the fact he was totally fine without any protection in a place full of mutated mosquitoes, his calm and stable expression was enough to scare them away. The two guys looked at Brother Yu for instructions.

Brother Yu felt awkward as he could feel the gazes from his two

followers. He placed his hand on his knife but released it again. He could see Luo Yuan was extremely impatient with them and understood that he could slowly build his reputation again if he loses it, but he could not be reborned if he was killed.

When he was about to say something polite, Huang Yuying suddenly talked to Luo Yuan, “Hi brother, you look quite young. Don’t risk your life here.”

And then she begged the head of the thugs gently and said, “Brother Yu, please calm down. Can you please forgive him? He is just a lunatic and he is really bad at communicating. Just give him a small punishment.”

The other two people were stunned and looked at Brother Yu again. He seemed to lose his cool as he would be embarrassed now if he let Luo Yuan go freely. He did not believe they could not kill Luo Yuan as he had three members in his team and Luo Yuan was alone. He hated Huang Yuying so badly at that point and could not wait to kill her for putting him in this situation. He stared at her and said, “You b*tch! Shut up! Why are you interrupting us guys talking!?”

He then took out his knife and said, “F*ck you! You think you can steal from me!? Brothers! Let’s kill him!”

Brother Yu rushed towards Luo Yuan while the other two were still hesitating. They eventually took out their weapons and followed their leader. Luo Yuan did not know whether the girl was retarded or wanted him to die. Brother Yu was about to surrender but now he has lodged an attack with his gang. Luo Yuan would

not have wasted so much time arguing with them in the first place if he could predict this as the end result!

Luo Yuan drew his knife out from its sheath and a shapeless energy was widespread around him which caused Brother Yu and his two followers to feel exhausted after just a short distance of running. They even encountered some breathing difficulties causing them to almost fall to the ground. Brother Yu wanted to slap himself as he was beginning to regret his actions. He thought Luo Yuan could be killed with assistance from his followers but he now knows that Luo Yuan is a fierce shark.

When he was about to beg him for forgiveness, his vision became blurred and could not see Luo Yuan anymore. He was shocked and kept looking for him nervously but in the next second, he felt coldness at his throat. His body walked a few steps without a head and then fell onto a big puddle of blood. The other two guys had not noticed it until the warm blood splattered onto their faces. They were frightened but that feeling soon disappeared.

Two more dead bodies were added to the puddle of blood after a few seconds. Luo Yuan did not like to kill but he has changed now that Hedong city is going to collapse and there are not many people walking on the street anymore. It was not a big deal to kill a few people. Luo Yuan sheathed his knife, looked at the lady who just peed in her pants, and then walked towards the rice bags. Luo Yuan placed the two bags on his shoulder and then walked towards Huang Jiahui and Wang Shishi.

“Wait! Can you bring me along? I’m willing to do anything for you as long as you provide meals for me.” The lady shouted.

Luo Yuan stopped for a second and said without turning back, “You should be grateful that I didn’t kill you. You almost got me into trouble and no one will say a word if I kill you! Go find someone else!”

Huang Yuying felt hopeless and her face looked pale. She cried out loud when she recalled her recent suffering. Luo Yuan smiled and continued to walk away. She then cried even louder but Luo Yuan just frowned after that as he did not plan to go back since there are just too many poor people around and he could not save them all. Besides, the lady did not leave a good impression on him.

Wang Shishi looked pale as she could not accept that the three of them became corpses in just a few seconds. She simply could not recover even after a long period which made Luo Yuan continue shaking his head.

“Why are you killing people again? You really don’t take the law seriously anymore? You really think murdering is like your daily chore now?” Huang Jiahui walked towards Luo Yuan and scolded him in frustration. However, after a while, she caringly asked him, “Are you alright? We should go soon, we will be in trouble if someone sees us.”

Luo Yuan was pleased with himself as he felt there was nothing to be afraid of. It was just a few people with knives who were not a threat to him. However, he was fond of Huang Jiahui showing care for him so he smiled and said, “These people can’t hurt me, let’s find a house!”

“Alright, but please don’t simply kill people again. Just talk nicely, we can just pay more if necessary.” Huang Jiahui reminded him.

Luo Yuan nodded. He was focusing on the villa in the district. Villas are usually big and spacious and most importantly, they are stronger than apartments. It is also a landed property which makes it easier to escape if there is a fire.

“The lady is following us!” Wang Shishi noticed her as was walking behind them and she suddenly asked, “Is she coming after Brother Luo?”

Luo Yuan turned around and saw that the lady was following them in the distance. But she stopped when she saw Luo Yuan staring at her. “It’s alright, let’s go!” Luo Yuan said.

Luo Yuan killed a few more mutated mosquitoes along the journey and after about 15 minutes, they arrived in front of a villa.

Chapter 68: An Eccentric Corpse

The villas here were definitely not of the premium kind but it is still considered as a detached villa. According to the previous rental rate, these villas cost about 6-7 million which Luo Yuan could never afford to own. There was a thick layer of dust accumulated in front of the villa and there were a few footprints left behind from their footsteps. It seems that the owner of the villa has not stepped out of the house for a very long time. Luo Yuan hinted to Huang Jiahui to knock on the door. People commonly think females are weak and gentle and hence they stay less alert. Hence, females are more suitable to be the middle person for communication with a stranger. Huang Jiahui went over and knocked on the door. She then shouted a few times but no one answered.

“Is this an empty house?” Huang Jiahui asked uncertainly.

“Probably!” Luo Yuan put his ear on the door and focused on listening. He did not hear any movement in the house and then said, “Shishi, could you check and see whether you can open the door?”

“Brother Luo, let me try.” Wang Shishi replied gently.

Other than failing to adapt to the corpses at the beginning, Wang Shishi has been quite positive since she escaped from the fire accident earlier. It was not because of the discovery of her super power but rather because she found herself to be more useful. She began by pushing smoke away, blocking flames, and then now even unlocking the door. She managed to help Luo Yuan at a

critical moment which made her feel that she is an important person.

After using her power, the door was unlocked and opened slowly. A choking and awful smell had spread around the house. Luo Yuan covered his nose and walked into the house first. Sometimes, it is not a good thing to have amplified senses as he felt extremely disgusted but Huang Jiahui and Wang Shishi did not feel anything.

“It’s true! Nobody stays here! There is a lot of dust on the floor!” Huang Jiahui checked and said.

“Does that mean the house is ours?” Wang Shishi asked excitedly. She looked around and sat on the genuine leather couch in the living room.

“This is not ours, we need to go if the house owner returns.” Huang Jiahui smiled as she liked the house as well.

“Such a nice house, I guess the owner had some accident. Brother Luo, what do you think?”

“Indeed. In fact I think the corpse is still here!” Luo Yuan nodded. He was worried something might happen if he leaves. He then said, “Both of you stay here, let me check it out!”

Both of them were shocked. Wang Shishi could not smile anymore and turned pale. Ghosts and corpses are the scariest things to her.

“It probably wasn’t a mosquito sting right?” Huang Jiahui said anxiously, “Please be more careful.”

Luo Yuan nodded and took his Zhanmadao. He then started checking all the rooms. Luo Yuan could sense everything within a 10 meters radius but the villa was about 200 square meters. Basically, it was difficult for him to check, especially because the walls in the house reduced his accuracy. He could only see one room clearly at a time but the rest were blurred and he needed to be checked one by one.

There were two bedrooms, a kitchen, and two bathrooms on the first floor. Luo Yuan walked around but he did not notice anything. He then moved to the second floor but he still did not see anything abnormal. In the end, he went to check the attic. Other than groceries, he did not see any signs of the corpse.

“I’ve checked all the rooms but still couldn’t find anything. I have no idea where the corpse is located.” Luo Yuan shook his head and continued, “But the choking smell proves that the corpse is here. I’m sure it is here!”

Huang Jiahui knew he has special powers so she did not doubt him. Although she did not smell anything awful, she is still afraid to sleep together with a corpse in the same house at night. She suddenly thought of something and said, “I’ve heard that rich people like to build a chamber underground, do you think there is one here?”

Luo Yuan was inspired! He knew that his vision could only penetrate 50 cm underground. Anything below that will only appear as a dark image. Therefore, he would not notice anything underground if he did not pay attention to it. Huang Jiahui stopped him when he was about to go to the underground chamber. She said, “That lady has been crying outside for a long time. It is quite pitiful. Should we let her come in?”

“The lady was a member of those bad people. Brother Luo just killed them, she might come for revenge!” Wang Shishi spoke with her instincts. She then frowned and said, “How could we let her in, we should chase her away!”

They did not expect her to follow them over such a long distance. Luo Yuan was fine to give her some food, but he did not want to let a stranger come in. He frowned and said, “Just leave her alone, she will go when the sky is dark.”

Huang Jiahui doubted what Wang Shishi had said as she could not believe the weak lady was still intending to get revenge when she could not even walk properly and is still crying. However, since she met Luo Yuan she has been less opinionated. Luo Yuan got back to the first floor and was wandering around the living room, bedroom, and kitchen but he still could not find anything. A normal underground chamber would usually not be deeper than 50 cm underground but apparently the one in the house was a lot deeper than that.

The only place left without inspection was the bathroom. Luo Yuan frowned again as he entered the bathroom because there was no exhaust fan inside and the bathroom was filled with a strong

and choking stench. He tried to identify the smell and realized the smell of corpse was stronger in the bathroom compared to other places in the house. He was sure the corpse was just somewhere in the bathroom. The bathroom was separated into two compartments by a thin glass partition. The outer chamber consisted of a toilet seat, dresser and a big mirror which was almost the same size as the wall. The inner chamber has an empty bathtub with a few oil paintings of human bodies hung on the wall. Suddenly, Luo Yuan noticed the right side of the bathroom was wider than the other parts. It was 1.2 meters wide.

He felt suspicious and tried to use his senses to check. He realized the interior of the cement was hollow and the wardrobe was just a cover. In fact, there was a dark space behind the wardrobe. Finally, he found it! Luo Yuan was delighted and quickly opened the wardrobe. He realized there was a gap in the wardrobe and he pushed the board once. He heard something open and he found a path which led to a dark staircase. At the same time, the awful smell grew stronger. His heart was beating faster as he felt very excited from his discovery.

The wardrobe was only about 1.5 meters in height so Luo Yuan bent down a little and squeezed into the wardrobe. He walked down the staircase and arrived at a space about 10 square meters in size. It was very dark and he could not even see his own fingers. However, he detected that this space was actually a storeroom with a lot of resources such as rice, flour, biscuits, can foods, cooking oil, clothes, medicines, coal, petrol, and he even found a coal generator. He also found a safe box on the wall, but he had no idea what was inside it. Luo Yuan was very happy as he scanned through the place. He knew all those resources were prepared by the owner before all the chaos started. Rich people generally prioritize their own life more than ordinary people and they

prepare well for challenges when most people are simply enjoying their life.

Luo Yuan did not check in detail regarding the resources as it was more important to find the corpse first. He continued going further into the storeroom. He was shocked by the scene in front of him even though he had psychologically prepared himself before entering the underground chamber. There were a lot of bones all over the floor. If he organized and counted the bones, it should be sufficient to make four full sets. The thing which freaked him out was that there was a corpse beside a pile of bones. The corpse was dark green in color and its clothes were shabby. However, its entire body was still in good condition as he could not see any sign of rotting. Luo Yuan focused his attention and realized the corpse was still breathing very slowly.

“What the heck! Is this a ghost!!?” Luo Yuan was horrified and his right hand was holding his knife tightly as he kept watching the corpse. This was a really strange phenomenon. The worst thing was that he found a mutant in the chamber as well. He tried to check any other possible living things around the chamber, but the result came back negative. The corpse and him were the only living things in there!

The atmosphere in the chamber became rather strange. He hesitated and then slowly moved forward. He suddenly stopped as he realized the living corpse began to breathe faster as it seemed to be triggered by something. Its heart was beating vigorously, and its eyelids were flickering. Suddenly, it opened its eyes!! It was a pair of horrible eyes which did not seem to be able to see anything. Its pupils were enlarging and occupied its entire eyeballs. Its body was very stiff which restricted its motion. It struggled to stand up and

produced some weird sounds from its throat. Its mouth opened widely and exposed its yellowish teeth with a lot of saliva dripping out. It was truly disgusting.

“What the hell is this!?” Luo Yuan looked distressed as he was certain this was not a human!

The living corpse started walking slowly towards Luo Yuan but then suddenly increased its speed!

Chapter 69: Enchanted Worm

Luo Yuan was frightened!

Fortunately, the speed of the zombie was too slow for him. The zombie groaned even before it could reach Luo Yuan as its forelimbs were detached from its shoulders. A normal human would have cried or screamed if they suffered that severity of pain. Even if they are strong, they would at least show some reaction on their face. However, the zombie did not give any response and it continued to “rush” towards Luo Yuan. Even though Luo Yuan was in shock, he did not get distracted. He bent down and cut through the zombie's knees.

Immediately after that, when the zombie was about to lift its left leg, both its legs collapsed and it fell to the ground. Again, there was no expression on its face even though there was a lot of blood gushing out from its wound. It basically did not feel anything. The only thing the zombie was left with was its ability to eat. However, Luo Yuan noticed that its blood was still fresh and bright red in color which was no different compared to the blood of a normal human being. It groaned softly and squirmed like a worm towards Luo Yuan.

Luo Yuan finally knew where all the bones came from! The zombie had eaten those people and threw their bones aside. Blood kept gushing out from the wounds of its arms and legs which formed a big puddle of blood. The blood was overflowing and began to travel to the food nearby. Luo Yuan definitely did not want the resources to be contaminated by the zombie's blood so he became very focused and determined. He was surrounded by an aura of strong energy and the air in the surrounding area became

still as his Zhanmadao released a beam of light.

He gripped the knife and slowly touched the blood with its blade. Suddenly, there were a lot of mists forming out of nowhere and the temperature in the chamber decreased drastically. The blood which was in contact with the blade was covered by a thin layer of ice. In the next second, the puddle of blood was frozen. The cold energy was still spreading around the chamber and reached the body of the zombie. It kept struggling but began to slow down and eventually was not able to move. The 'cooling effect' of the Zhanmadao was amazing! Although Luo Yuan had already seen it a few times, he still thought it was unreal as the power of his knife was beyond his imagination.

Luo Yuan was worried that the zombie was still alive so he stabbed his knife through its skull and dug inside its brain to ensure it was completely damaged. Only then did he withdraw his knife. Although he did not consume much energy to kill the zombie, he was not relieved.

Everything became abnormal since last December. The plants and animals were growing abnormally and now even humans are facing the same problem. He did not know whether there was only one zombie or if there are more wandering in different places around Hedong city. The zombie looked weak to him, but normal people probably could not handle that kind of mutant. Apparently, the monster had been starved for a long time which weakened its power. It would have been a disaster if it was at its optimal level. Besides that, the monster looked exactly like a normal human other than for its eyes. This could easily confuse people. Those who bump into the monster would not even be aware of it and if all the zombies came to Hedong city at the same time, it will be

disastrous to everyone.

Luo Yuan shook his head to stop himself from thinking too much. In most ways he is just a normal person and he cannot do much by overthinking. He found a shovel in the storeroom along with a few boxes of resources and started to clean. Luckily the blood was frozen which made it easier. He was avoiding any skin contact with the blood of the monster at all cost. Nobody knows how the monster was formed and it would be horrendous if he got infected. He figured that the virus could not be airborne as everyone would have died by now if that were the case.

After he cleaned the blood, he put all the limbs of the zombie into a box. He then took out another big box but while he was attempting to move the corpse into it with the shovel, he realized the corpse made some odd sounds. He also noticed that the corpse's face was moving and his mouth began to open wider and wider. Suddenly, a white worm which looked like a centipede crawled out from its mouth!

Its body was long about 10cm in length and 2mm wide. There were numerous tiny legs on both sides of its body. It seemed to know it was in danger and quickly ran to the corner. Luo Yuan was stunned for a moment and then picked up his knife. He rushed over and sliced the worm. It was split into two pieces but still jumped to escape. The worm was powerful and it could jump up to 1 meter in height. Luo Yuan looked at it and smiled. He then sliced one half of its body in the air and cut off its head. It struggled for a moment but finally died.

Luo Yuan used his identification power:

“Enchanted worm”

“Function: Ingredient”

“Rarity: White”

“Weight: 10 grams”

"Comment: This is a substance which can increase excitement."

“Enchanted worm!? The zombie was controlled by the worm?”

Luo Yuan did not dare to neglect its power even though it is just an organism from the white category. This is because grades were a poor measure of its power since its host also determined how much power it could command. If the host is a strong creature, then the worm will be stronger. It was a parasite in the body of a normal human which made it easier to be killed. However, if the worm were living in a blue level mutant, that would be a very different battle. There is the possibility that he might not be able to kill it.

In some ways, the worm could even strengthen the power of its host which is a very scary thought to Luo Yuan. He knew some of the mutants are extremely dangerous even if they are small. Just

like the mutated leeches earlier and now the enchanted worm. However, he was amazed by the comment as the worm was basically likened to drugs. He hesitated but then decided to keep the worm.

Drugs were getting more common during this chaotic period and many people discovered its pleasures. Perhaps, the tiny worm would cost as much as a beast from the blue category. Luo Yuan found a handbook, tore off a page and then wrapped the worm. He proceeded to continue cleaning the area. After about 15 minutes, he walked out of the underground chamber with the boxes. Luo Yuan noticed that the lady was still sitting outside the house. She quickly stood up when she saw Luo Yuan walking towards her and her jaw dropped as she did not know what to say.

Luo Yuan looked at her suspiciously. He could see that her eyes were swollen like a peach and he was surprised she was still here even though the sky was almost dark. He did not say anything as he did not believe she would still be there when the sky turned completely dark. Luo Yuan passed by her and quickly threw the boxes into the bushes.

After throwing the boxes away, Luo Yuan checked the entire house again to avoid overlooking some other weird creatures. He had killed more than 10 cockroaches and flies, as well as a few ants in the furniture. Other than that, he also kept seven snails which were as big as a fist. After identification, he learned that all the small insects he killed can be cooked. It could be quite delicious if the chef is skillful.

Suddenly, he recalled the safe box in the chamber underground

which he had not checked. He returned to the chamber and thought to himself, “Hopefully the things inside are not bank passbooks or something similar.” He pulled out his Zhanmadao and inserted the blade into the gap of the box. It was weak and broke after a few strikes from the Zhanmadao.

Chapter 70: Help Seeker

There were three property grants, a few passbooks, as well as some important documents and contracts in the safe box. However, those things are worthless to Luo Yuan. The first thing he targeted was a few stacks of food stamps which were valued at 50 kg each. He would have about 50,000 kg or more worth of food stamps if each stack were 5,000 kg! Besides that, there were seven Olympic Gold medals in the box and each weighed 100 grams. These are very valuable but the highlight in the safe box was the handgun which is a rare treasure of the nation-Desert Eagle.

Even though the prohibition policies for weapons in Hedong city is much stricter than in Donghu city, they no longer applied in the current situation. A person with good connections will find it easy to get a gun and the government is fine with it as long as people do not keep flaunting it publicly. However, the handgun in the safe box did not seem to be purchased from the underground market before the mutation incident.

Luo Yuan held the Desert Eagle in his palm and it almost fell. The gun weighed about 2 kg and hosted a large diameter bullet. If he could obtain better bullets, it might even be able to shoot through a tank! However, only professionals or those who have undergone training could master the Desert Eagle as the recoil momentum could hurt or even break the arm of the user.

Luo Yuan checked the safe box again and realized there were eight boxes of bullets inside. He suspected that the owner was probably not a good person. He played with the gun for a while and put it into his pocket after locking the safe. He wanted to give it to Huang Jiahui as he knew she would be able to master it with her

qualified shooting skills.

Huang Jiahui's energy has improved after consuming a lot of nutritious meats over a period time. She is stronger than many men and should be able to easily handle the Desert Eagle. Luo Yuan left the gold medals and food stamps in the safe box at the entrance of the chamber which was hidden in the dark and is quite difficult to notice. It was better to just leave it in the safe box than keeping it elsewhere. Luo Yuan also found a torchlight and kept it in his pocket as he left the chamber with three cans of food. Luo Yuan told Huang Jiahui and Wang Shishi about his discovery in the chamber, which they were very excited to learn.

“Is there really so much food!?” Huang Jiahui grabbed his arm excitedly and asked.

Since the outbreak, food has become very valuable. It is now even more valuable than money and gold. Huang Jiahui was initially quite depressed as she lost a lot of food in the fire accident earlier. She did not expect to get the food back but this is even more than what she had earlier!

“I didn't actually count, but it should be around 20 bags and each were about 50 kg. Besides that, there is flour, canned food, instant noodles, biscuits, and preserved vegetables. There were also some other groceries in the storeroom. I guess it is enough to sustain us for a year!” Luo Yuan said happily.

“Then we are rich! It can be traded for a lot of money right?” Wang Shishi asked stupidly. “You want to sell it?” Luo Yuan asked out of shock.

Although Wang Shishi did not have much life experience, she knew there are things which money could not buy. She replied gently, "No way! I want a lot of food! It would be great if it is enough to sustain me until my last breath! Then I don't have to worry anymore."

Wang Shishi then turned her attention to the three cans of food. She suddenly said, "Wow! It's imported can food, must be expensive!"

She could not wait to check it out. "Seafood, meat, and fruits! Brother Luo, I want the canned food with cherries inside! Can I? Please? I can't remember when was the last time I had cherries."

Luo Yuan looked at her greedy face, but felt bad and said, "Alright! Eat all you want today!"

Huang Jiahui smiled ecstatically. Almost all females like eating fruits but it was not polite for her to ask for it like how Wang Shishi did just now. "Oh! I almost forgot to prepare the meal, I'm going now." Huang Jiahui was simply too happy.

There was a fire accident when they last had their meal and everyone was busy trying to escape. Only now did they start feeling hungry.

"Just forget about it. I don't think it is convenient to cook in the dark. Just heat the canned food for dinner." Luo Yuan said as he observed that the sky was already dark.

“Awesome!” Wang Shishi cheered happily. A proper meal is never attractive to girls at her age. Junk food will always be preferred instead!

Huang Jiahui nodded her head and picked a few cans of beef and seafood and then entered the kitchen. “Oh wait, here is a torchlight.” Luo Yuan took out the torchlight from his pocket and passed it to Huang Jiahui.

Huang Yuying wrapped herself tightly with her raincoat. She felt the joys in the house were strange and awkward to her. Teardrops rolled down to her cheeks as she recalled the painful memories she had over the last few days. The three guys who had been killed by Luo Yuan had broke into her house and grabbed all her food. Even though her husband was mad, he did not dare to protest and only kept on begging them to stop. The weak characteristics of her husband enhanced the power of those three bastards. They were attracted by her appearance as well as her fair body. She tried her best to resist but one of them threatened to kill her husband if she did not comply.

She was locked down on the bed while watching her husband who did not dare to look at her. She hesitated for a moment but later obeyed hopelessly. That was a horrible nightmare for her. The three bastards took turns to penetrate her until she felt numb. She only knew someone was lying on top of her and she was forced to do several shameful actions. When she woke up, she saw her husband, who had quit smoking for many years, smoking in the living room.

Both of them remained silent for a moment when she came out from the room and then cried in each other's arms. Her husband cried and said he will not blame her and he will love her forever. None of them had good sleep that night and both of them hugged each other and talked through the night. During the dawn, he told her he will definitely protect her if the three bastards came back again. She was touched but she could not stop crying.

The next day, the same thing happened again. Her husband stood up for her a few times but got punched very brutally and then he went back to the guest room while Huang Yuying was dragged to the master room and got raped once again. She was so disappointed. She felt cold as she did not understand why her husband was not protesting and protecting her. She was ready to die at that moment. She was not afraid of death as long as they could die together.

She hated her husband and herself. She blamed herself for marrying a weak man. Finding an ideal man who is polite, gentle, passionate and romantic, were all hopeless thoughts. It was beautiful but fragile. On the third day, the slaps and hurtful words from her husband made her give up. She did not miss anything between them anymore and decided to give her best to the three bastards in front of her husband as she was desperate and hopeless.

She acted on her impulse as requested to follow the three of them. There was an explosion in her apartment and she was shocked to find out that her unit had been blown up. She was dragged by one of the gang members in the chaos and followed the three bastards. She was lucky to bump into their "neighbour" and she decided to incite him to kill the three bastards when she realized they were actually scared of Luo Yuan.

She hated her husband but she hated the three bastards even more. She is a smart woman and studied all of their personalities and characteristics in just a few days. She knew Brother Yu prioritized his reputation and she intentionally tried to make him feel embarrassed so that he would challenge Luo Yuan. However, she did not expect such an awful and horrible scene when the three bastards were easily killed by Luo Yuan!

Huang Yuying should have been happy when her plan of revenge succeeded. However, she did not have a place to stay. When she saw Luo Yuan about to leave, she quickly begged him to bring her along even though she was afraid of him. She was even ready to seduce him. After a few days of sexual activities, she became more aggressive compared to last time. She thought it was better to be raped by one guy than a few guys. However, the thing which shocked her is the fact that Luo Yuan rejected her. Only then did she realize she had made a big mistake. She used him and almost caused him to die. If he were a normal person, he would have been killed and no one would forgive that kind of mistake.

She had second thoughts about following them as she noticed his calm reaction even after killing a few people. Murder did not look like a serious matter to Luo Yuan. It became apparent to her that this was not the first time he killed. She believed it would not be a surprise if he returned to kill her as well. If the three bastards are the hyenas of the grassland then Luo Yuan will be the mighty male lion. Her mind told her to stay away from that kind of dangerous person but her body involuntarily followed them the whole way.

Suddenly, she was disturbed by some weird sounds from the bushes which caught her attention. The villa was surrounded by a

lot of greenery and the nearest bushes were just two meters away from her. The bushes were swaying in the dark and she thought there was a mutated beast hiding there. She began to shiver, but after a while, she realized it was the wind which made the sound! She curled her body as she felt scared and cold. She licked her dry lips and felt that her stomach was growling when she smelled the cooked meat through the gaps of the door. She had not eaten anything since lunch and the porridge she ate earlier had probably been fully digested by now.

Suddenly, something covered her helmet and she shivered again under the moonlight. The dark object immediately flew up and disappeared when she shrugged it off. She had not had enough time to recover when the object fell on her shoes again.

"Mu...mutated mosquito!!"

Her brain was blank and her entire body went stiff. She was in a state of shock and she struggled to get up to her feet. She dashed to their door and knocked on it vigorously, "Help! Help me! Please! Help!"

Chapter 71: Endless Battle

There was no one inside. Huang Yuying almost collapsed, her teeth rubbing on the inside her mouth as she screamed in panic, "I'm begging you! Please open the door! Please!"

Amid her hopelessness, she heard the doorknob turn. The sound of the door being unlocked was like music to her ears, like a light of hope in the darkness. The door was opened, but just as she was about to step in, she found a young man blocking the entrance, looking at her coldly. She stopped and shivered as she looked into his eyes. She suddenly seemed to have forgotten about the scary mutated mosquitoes.

"I... Outside." Huang Yuying didn't know what to say. Her brain had gone blank.

"Come in," Luo Yuan suddenly said.

"I... Oh, thank you, thank you so much." Huang Yuying did not know how else to respond, so she thanked him excitedly.

She lowered her chin as she entered the house anxiously. There were two people there watching her and judging her.

"Sit down and help yourself. We can talk after dinner," Luo Yuan said as he frowned.

Huang Yuying nodded and took off her helmet. She moved a chair close to the dining table and sat down carefully. Luo Yuan had not realized she was so pretty until she had taken off her helmet. He was amazed. She was not pretty in a slutty way. She was beautiful. Wang Shishi watched her carefully. The fact that the newcomer looked better than Huang Jiahui made her sense some danger. Luo Yuan turned his gaze away and went to the washroom. He opened his hand and realized there was a squashed mutated mosquito on his palm. He washed it away in disgust. When he came back from the washroom, he found Huang Jiahui chatting with Huang Yuying.

“Which department were you in?” Huang Jiahui asked as she smiled.

“I was teaching History in Year 9,” Huang Yuying replied, putting down her chopsticks.

“Then why did you join those bullies? You don’t look like a bad person,” Huang Jiahui said honestly. She really did not think that Huang Yuying was evil.

“I did not have a choice,” Huang Yuying smiled awkwardly.

Huang Jiahui seemed to understand and stopped asking. She just sighed and said, “There’s been some chaos in our area recently. Most of the pretty girls have gotten into trouble. Actually, we should consider ourselves lucky just to be alive under the circumstances. We thought Hedong City would be more stable and safe when we first arrived here. We really did not expect things to change so drastically.”

She started to get worried as she thought about the chaos not coming to an end. She did not know where she would go if a war like the one in Donghu City broke out there.

"Oh, are you from Donghu City too? My mother also lives in Donghu City. Actually, in a nearby village." Huang Yuying started to sob again as she talked, "We have lost contact since all communications broke down. I have no idea how she's doing."

Huang Jiahui did not know how to comfort her. She could only sigh. A moment later, she asked her, "Does that mean you have no relatives in Hedong City? What about your husband? I thought you were married."

Huang Yuying looked heartbroken as tears started gushing out of her eyes. Everyone knew what had happened to her, even though she hadn't said anything. Luo Yuan returned to his seat. His ears were sensitive and he had actually heard most of the conversation. Although he was not happy with her earlier actions, he still felt sympathy towards her. He said, "You still have relatives here, right? I'll take you to them tomorrow."

Huang Yuying had not expected Luo Yuan to offer. She looked surprised. She was about to stand up when she felt that something was wrong. She wiped her tears away quickly and said, "No, not anymore. My father-in-law lives nearby, but I don't want to go there. I can't face him."

She was crying again. After a moment, she pushed her chair back

and stood up. Luo Yuan was shocked. He wondered what was she going to do when she suddenly knelt down and said, "Please, let me to stay with you. I'll do anything you ask."

Luo Yuan stood up awkwardly and moved to the side. Huang Jiahui could not bear to watch the scene. She quickly pulled Huang Yuying up, saying, "It's alright, it's alright. We promise, just get up. The house does not belong to us, but we have some extra food. You can stay as long as you want."

"If Jiahui agrees, you can stay with us. But there is nothing free in this world. Starting tomorrow, all meals and house chores will be your responsibility." Luo Yuan knew not to reject her request when he saw the look Huang Jiahui was giving him. Plus, there was a lot of food in the underground chamber. It was more than enough to feed them all.

"Of course! I'll do my best!" Huang Yuying said, looking excited. "Thank you, Sister Huang. Thank you so much!"

She did not know Luo Yuan's name, so she stopped talking even though she did not look like she had finished her words.

"I'm Luo Yuan," Luo Yuan said.

"Thank you, Brother Luo."

Wang Shishi was not happy. She thought Huang Yuying looked older than Luo Yuan, yet she still addressed him as Brother Luo.

Huang Yuying started cleaning the dining table after dinner, even though Huang Jiahui told her not to. In the end, they cleaned it together. Then it was time for Huang Yuying to choose a room. There were four bedrooms in the house, one master bedroom and three guest bedrooms on the first and second floor. Luo Yuan and Huang Jiahui naturally had taken the master bedroom on the second floor, and Wang Shishi had taken the guest bedroom on the same floor. Huang Yuying decided to stay in the guest bedroom on the first floor.

Even though it was just a guest room, the room was quite spacious and cozy. The walls were light orange and there were many advanced home appliances, although they only served as decoration. The only imperfection was the dust. The room was quite dirty and the blanket on the bed smelled.

When the three of them left, Huang Yuying closed the door and sat on the edge of the bed in the dark. She felt like she was dreaming. She could stay with them after all. A few minutes later, she entered the bathroom in the dark. Her long dress dropped from her smooth shoulders, exposing her bruised body. She hated her body so much. She turned on the shower and scrubbed herself, wanting to wash away the dirty marks left by those three bastards.

After a while, she stopped. Her entire body was red from scrubbing and she had scrubbed her pubic area so hard it hurt. She walked a few steps before she frowned. She touched her pubic area and realized there was blood. Somehow, she felt relieved. She looked for some tissue under the light of the moon and pressed it against her wounds. She lied down on the bed and looked at the ceiling in the dark. She suddenly felt safe as she listened to the

weird buzzing and chirping sounds of the birds and insects outside.

“Fantastic!” she thought. She suddenly felt extremely sleepy. She slowly closed her eyes and drifted off to sleep.

Chapter 72: Pesticide

“Physique +1”

Luo Yuan had just woken up and begun to stretch when the system beeped. He leaped with joy as he read the notification. Physique was an attribute he had never upgraded using his attribute points – his physical training had finally paid off.

Physique was the only one out of the three core attributes that did not reflect one's combat skills; he had always known it would be a bad investment to improve his physique using his attribute points, which was why he had distributed them to other attributes, such as Strength and Dexterity, thus weakening his physique and affecting his physical efficiency. This was why he had terrible stamina, and why he had never been able to last long in physically strenuous activities like sports.

Physical training had always been a slow process for him. Ever since his physique had achieved 11 points two years ago, it had remained stagnant. He had even considered investing some attribute points in it if it did not improve by his next level up.

I shouldn't be so surprised. I have been training for so long, it's about damn time my physique points increased!

There had been a severe imbalance in his attributes after he had increased his Dexterity, which had caused a certain strain on his physique – his stamina had been unable to keep up. After going

through an intense period of physical training, Luo Yuan had been able to push his potential and finally improve his physique. Unfortunately, an attribute improved by personal training did not carry as much weight; at 12 points he felt no better than he had at 11.

Luo Yuan got dressed and checked his watch, seeing it was nearly ten in the morning. Huang Jiahui had already woken up a while ago and left him some clean clothes by his bed. He washed up and walked into the major spring cleaning taking place downstairs.

“About time you woke up, sleepyhead!” Wang Shishi said as Luo Yuan walked down the stairs.

He smiled, failing to mask the pain on his face. He was drained from last night, exhausted beyond any battle fatigue. He still felt the ache and soreness all over his body. The horrific experience was still lingering on his mind, but he realized his oversensitivity might not be such a bad thing. How else would he experience such pleasure during coitus?

Huang Yuying stopped mopping the floor and hesitantly greeted him with a smile, “Brother Luo!”

She was dressed in Huang Jiahui’s clothes – it was a good fit as the two of them had a similar built. Luo Yuan would have thought she was Huang Jiahui if she hadn’t lifted her head.

He nodded and asked, “Where’s Jiahui?”

“Oh...She’s on the first floor cleaning the windows of the washroom... I’ve left porridge in a food container... It’s still warm if you want to have it now!”

He acknowledged her remark as he walked past her.

Huang Yuying exhaled and wiped the sweat that was breaking on her forehead. It still stressed her out to speak to Luo Yuan, even if it was from a distance.

Realizing that he could be of no help with the cleaning, Luo Yuan walked into the kitchen and opened the food container. It was a rich breakfast – a bowl of porridge, half a salted egg and a dish of reheated luncheon meat. He had just finished the porridge when there was a loud knock on the front door.

“Open the door! We’re from the City Council Safety Committee! We’ve got an urgent notice!”

His face changed as he rushed to answer the door. Two men in protective gear were standing by the entrance, looking suspiciously like soldiers. They quickly rushed indoors as Luo Yuan frantically closed the door, pretending to be afraid of the mutant mosquitoes outside.

The two men circled the living room. One of them lifted a stack of documents as he eyed Luo Yuan suspiciously. He looked at a printed photo, seeming doubtful as he asked, “Are you a tenant here in this unit?”

“Yes, sir. Is there some kind of problem?” Luo Yuan replied.

“The photo on the deed does not look like you.” The man spoke softly and arrogantly like a typical government officer. “Are you Zhao Jianfeng?”

Luo Yuan was surprised by the question. Thousands of neurons started firing inside his brain.

This can't be right. I've seen the deed in the basement – even if it was just a glance my genius 13-point Intelligence would have registered it accurately. The name on the deed was definitely not Zhao Jianfeng!

He looked at the officer's face through the protective gear and saw the mockery there – Luo Yuan understood what was going on. He remained calm, hoping the doubt would not show on his face. “Zhao Jianfeng? You must be mistaken, sir. My name is Zhou Jianfeng, not Zhao.”

The officer's eyes widened as he pretended to review the data in his hand. “My apologies. I have indeed misread it.” However that did not make the officer look any less suspicious, especially when he noticed the younger of the two girls standing at a distance looking rather anxious.

Wang Shishi had never experienced such an encounter. She was shaking like she had been caught shoplifting.

“Ma’am, could you step over here for a moment, please? I am an officer of the City Council Safety Committee and I need you to confirm some information.” He gestured for Wang Shishi, who was shrinking at the far corner.

She panicked, beads of sweat dripping down her messy hair as her face reddened. She stood still, not knowing what to do.

Luo Yuan broke the silence, trying to handle the situation, “Sir, if there’s any problem, please just say it directly. I don’t believe you’ve come all the way here just to check the deed.”

The second officer moved past his colleague and looked Luo Yuan in the eye before he finally spoke, “Excuse me, Comrade. What are you saying? Hedong City is no longer safe – innocent civilians are being slaughtered, homes are being broken into – it is imperative that we fortify the city safety measures! We as government officials would definitely not wrongly accuse an innocent person, nor would we ever let a criminal roam free. It has come to our attention that this house might not be yours, and that you might have murdered its rightful owner.”

If killing could have solved this, I would have already sliced these bloody bastards to bits! But these are not some random people that I can just kill – it’s way too risky and we can’t afford the consequences. As soon as I kill them, reinforcements will surround the whole area. We could potentially escape from the gap upstairs, but considering how tight the space is, we wouldn’t be able to take enough provisions with us. It’s pretty obvious that these two are not here just to investigate a petty lodging matter. As long as the mutated mosquitoes are not eliminated, the government is

basically bruised, battered and burdened by the pressure of it all. The only logical explanation is that they're here to take advantage of civilians and create problems where there are none.

Luo Yuan smiled, and spoke slowly after composing his thoughts, "Why, officers, how could this house belong to somebody else? You best start talking sense. I may not know what the purpose of your visit is, but I sure know how society works."

Then he turned to the girls, "Shishi, go to my bedroom and bring the food stamps from my desk."

"O-okay!" Wang Shishi dropped the broom and ran frantically up the stairs. A few minutes later, she returned with two stacks of food stamps. The amount took Luo Yuan aback – she'd brought along all of her and Huang Jiahui's savings too.

Luo Yuan took the food stamps from Wang Shishi, trying to keep his calm and imagine that he was just feeding stray dogs. After several rounds of acting hesitant about accepting the bribe, in the end the officers took the food stamps, which somehow disgusted Luo Yuan even more.

After accepting the money, the officers' faces lightened up and the first man spoke again, "We apologize about the misunderstanding, and how strict we might have come off. This district is becoming more and more problematic. Just a piece of advice-you best get things in order with the Housing Ministry; they will eventually come after you."

“Alright. Thanks, officers. Glad that everything is sorted out,” Luo Yuan said with a grin.

“Oh, before we forget, there’s one more thing we’re supposed to inform you about. Tomorrow at 10 a.m. the City Council will exterminate the mutated mosquitoes by spraying a newly-developed pesticide that was proven to be effective in the lab. It should be harmless to the human body as long as you don’t inhale too much of it. During that time, you are all required to stay indoors. Also, to avoid any potential cases of allergic reactions and mass hysteria, each civilian will receive a free anti-toxic mask from the city council.”

After asking Luo Yuan the number of tenants in the house, the officers handed him four paper boxes.

Chapter 73: The Wriggling Corrosive Earthworm

When the officers left, Luo Yuan picked up one of the boxes and examined the anti-toxic mask inside.

My God, the pesticide must be severely toxic for them to resort to this kind of protective measure.

A chemical cocktail strong enough to kill off mutated mosquitoes had to be equally deadly to humans; as the mosquitoes had evolved, their vitality and resistance to poison had also evolved by hundreds, or even a thousand times. Unless a gene-altering medicine had been developed, it was safe to say that the pesticide the officers had claimed to be harmless to civilians was complete bullshit. However, even the best biomedical laboratory would not have been able to engineer a mosquito-gene-altering medicine in such short notice – everything was just theoretical.

“Brother Luo, did I bring out too much money?” Wang Shishi asked, finally coming to her senses. She still couldn’t believe that, in her fear and haste, she had brought out most of their money, leaving nothing but small change and a few strips of gold for them. It terrified her even more that Luo Yuan was being so quiet.

Luo Yuan didn’t know how to react, but he couldn’t help but feel sorry for Wang Shishi, who seemed to be weighed down by the guilt of what she had done. “Nah, It’s alright. We can earn back that money!”

Twenty thousand may have sounded like a lot but in fact, it equaled only about two rounds of freelance hunting. Plus, they still had ten stacks of food stamps locked inside the safe in the basement. Still, twenty thousand might not have been much, but it wasn't an amount worth spending on a bribe. Luo Yuan couldn't completely put the blame on Wang Shishi though. Any civilian would have been obedient in the face government exerted violence – even a university student would have soiled their pants. After all, she was just a fourteen year-old girl.

Wang Shishi sighed in relief. Luo Yuan had not given her an earful, but she still couldn't help but ache. She had just given away most of their savings for a minor bribe.

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9:50 a.m. – the alarm shrieked, waking the civilians of Hedong City from the silence of slumber. Fighter jets began circling the sky above the city. As time slowly crawled to 10:00 a.m., most people had already awakened.

The rumbling of jet engines outside drew closer, vigorously thundering the air particles and making the windows vibrate to the point of nearly shattering. Luo Yuan peeked through the window and saw a large bomber jet flying in their direction; judging by how dangerously close it was to the peak of the nearest high-rise, he estimated that the jet's altitude was no more than 300 meters. After making a routine circle above, its wingtips began pumping pesticide. Thick pumps of white gas descended from above. In almost an instant, the whole city was covered in a thick fog, visibility diminishing rapidly.

Even though he was wearing the anti-toxic mask, the pungent smell of chemicals still managed to pierce Luo Yuan's nose. They spent the whole morning covering all door and window gaps with wet cloths, but it was not effective in keeping the fog out.

Huang Jiahui looked at Luo Yuan, insecurity showing in her eyes. He held her hand and felt how moist her palm had gotten.

He noticed the visibility in the house was not too bad, and asked in a muffled voice, "Hey, are you alright? This slight exposure shouldn't be too harmful to us."

Wang Shishi, on the other hand, did not look shaken. She seemed quite excited by the mist looming outside. Her young body allowed her to tolerate the gas slightly longer than the other two; she'd decided to wait until the air thickened before wearing the mask. Then she realized acting calm probably hadn't been such a great idea – seeing Luo Yuan holding Huang Jiahui's hand made her feel jealous. She regretted not acting scared and missing the opportunity to share the same intimacy with him.

She reached out to hold Luo Yuan's other hand as her heart raced.

The bomber jet would not stop circling the sky. It kept releasing pesticide from above as the fog covered their whole window. Even with Luo Yuan's eyesight, he could only see about 7-8 meters high.

Turbid yellow liquid started coagulating on the windowpane and

slowly dripping bit by bit, leaving behind trails of sodium-coloured stains. A mutated mosquito the size of a child's fist flew by in a drunken-like trance. It moved in slow random motion before eventually bumping into the window.

The windows were made of high-quality glass – other than the dark stains left by the condensation, most parts were relatively undamaged. However, due to the constant vibration the wet clothes stuffed into the gaps started falling out and the fog began to creep inside.

Luo Yuan ran quickly to reseal the gaps. That's when the earth started shaking.

“What the... Is that an earthquake?”

All was silent as the earth began to shake. The only sound was the muffled sound of their breathing through the mask. The earthquake seemed peculiar and sporadic with its timing – one moment everything was still and the next the earth was shaking once again. The look on Luo Yuan's face changed. He later heard that it wasn't just the earth, but the sound of plants being torn apart as well. He paid attention to the sound and was certain that it was no earthquake, but a monster moving in the area. He couldn't hear the monster's cries, but he estimated it to be no more than 100 meters away.

Concrete started falling off buildings following the explosive noise – it was as loud as buildings collapsing. The sound of trees falling drew closer as the monster headed in their direction. Oblivious to the impending horror, Huang Jiahui was petrified –

she just stood there shaking, her teeth grinding. She may have been confident of the relationship between her and Luo Yuan but at times like these, she couldn't help but fear that he might go and leave her behind.

“Brother Luo, what's happening?” Wong Shishi had lost any sliver of calmness she had in her.

“Something's coming. We have to get to the basement. GO! NOW!”

He grabbed a flashlight and opened the door as they ran as fast as they could.

“Follow me!” Luo Yuan walked into the washroom and pushed aside the wardrobe to reveal a hatch on the floor leading to the basement. He handed the flashlight to Wang Shishi, “You two get to the basement.”

Wang Shishi was the first to walk down the steps while Huang Jiahui followed her. She hesitated. One look at his eyes and she knew – he had no intention of following them.

“It's so dark in here, why aren't you coming down with us?” Huang Jiahui shouted from the basement. She noticed that Huang Yuying had already made her way there.

“You stay put, I'm going to take a look!”

“Are you crazy? The air is reeking with poisonous gas! You will die! Luo Yuan, PLEASE! WAIT! COME BACK!” she shouted with tears in her eyes.

“There is a monster coming this way and if the villa gets destroyed we will all die! Don’t worry, my body is stronger than the average man’s. A slight exposure to the pesticide won’t kill me!”

“You don’t know that! What if the monster is just passing by?” Huang Jiahui cried.

“I don’t believe in luck. Stop asking me to stay! You know you’re only pissing me off!”

Huang Jiahui was stunned, the words caught in her throat.

“Brother Luo, I... I want to come with you!” Wang Shishi said. She believed that her body might be able to suppress the effects of the pesticide, so she offered to aid Luo Yuan.

“What? Aren’t you afraid?”

“Of course not! As long as Brother Luo is with me, I’m not afraid of anything!”

Luo Yuan wasn’t sure what to think but he knew there wasn’t much time to lose. “Alright then! It would be helpful to have your powers to assist me.”

He figured it would be good practice for her as well. Despite how weak her powers may be, she was still able to move about 20 kilos. All she needed was to deliver a lethal attack. Considering how special her powers were, in some ways she could potentially be stronger than Luo Yuan, although obviously not in terms of brute force.

She won't learn anything unless she engages in combat!

“Initiating E-Grade Mission: Kill the Corrosive Earthworm”

“Mission Duration: 3 hours”

“Accept / Decline”

“A BLUE RANK MONSTER?!”

Chapter 74: Mud

Luo Yuan's heart sank. He had predicted that the corrosive earthworm would be the same mutated earthworm he had encountered earlier – big in size but not particularly aggressive despite its unbearable stench. However, it was still a light-blue rank monster.

But that was in the past – about a month ago! Clearly this earthworm has evolved. Anyway, I better see it with my own eyes.

Wang Shishi struggled to get out of the basement, her face filled with both excitement and horror. Luo Yuan was in no mood to wait for her. He walked to the door as she carefully stepped out of the hatch and ran to catch up with him.

Huang Jiahui heard their footsteps soften as they walked away. She formed a fist with her hand.

EVOLVE ALREADY!

When Luo Yuan opened the door, they were greeted by a gush of white fog. However, the fog couldn't reach them as an invisible dome had been projected, shielding them from the mist. The mist before them was thick and it haunted the area with an eerie crawl, blocking Luo Yuan's sight.

Judging by its breath, this is definitely a blue rank monster, which means it must be immune to the toxins of the pesticide. Come to think of it, the pesticide might have been a catalyst to the

species' evolution. It might have even triggered its rise to the surface. If I could describe its mysterious breath with one word, it would have to be “oppressive”, because damn could this thing suffocate a person!

Every living organism was constantly exerting a specific power of magnetic energy – the larger they were, the stronger the magnetic force they exerted. When a human came into contact with a larger living organism, the stronger magnetic force was capable of putting the human under a state of oppressed confusion.

Considering he had already slayed two blue rank monsters, the physical and mental oppression was the least of Luo Yuan's worries. However, that was not true for Wang Shishi.

Any trace of excitement had been washed away by her overwhelming fear – they hadn't gotten far, yet she was already breaking into cold sweat. She would have run away, but she knew that Luo Yuan needed her there to shield him from the mist. She started trembling and unconsciously moved closer to Luo Yuan, who kept walking forward cautiously.

Suddenly, a colossal silhouette towered over them, its shadow covering them as it zoomed high through the mist. It seemed to be momentarily suspended in mid-air before it began falling.

The earth shook vigorously as buildings and trees fell, raining shrapnel all around Luo Yuan and Wang Shishi.

Luo Yuan stopped in his tracks and looked back at Wang Shishi.

“You stay right here. Don’t go anywhere. I’ll go take a look.”

“Bu-bbbbut. What about you?”

“The toxins won’t hurt me for a few minutes. You wait right here and be ready to shield me when I return.” He took a few deep breaths and ran into the open space, holding his breath.

Luo Yuan had always had a very sharp perception of the environment, and he had caught sight of something strange when the shrapnel had shot past the shield – it had seemed to be liquified. He tried to recall the monster’s system name. It was still an earthworm, but it had intense corrosive abilities and that was not something to joke about. He worried that it would prove extremely difficult to protect Wang Shishi and avoid the earthworm’s slime at the same time.

The mist was getting thicker – his skin had already started getting moist within the short time that had passed since leaving Wang Shishi’s protective shield. The intensity of the pesticide’s chemicals had him itching.

I must finish this A.S.A.P! I can’t risk being exposed for too long.

He felt the irritation on his skin and bit down the urge to scratch himself. He hastened his pace, gripping tightly the hilt of his sword. Within seconds, he had arrived on the peak of a hill, leaving a trail through the mist as he ran swiftly.

A hundred meters in six seconds. That's a new record!

His scabbard began glowing blindingly– the earthworm had to be nearby. The environment started growing violently, rocks and tree branches raining from above as the earthworm accelerated towards him. The distance between them got shorter.

In a split second, his senses picked up its humongous presence. They were less than ten meters apart, charging at each other with no intention of slowing down.

Ten meters... five... ONE!

As they collided, Luo Yuan struggled to reach for his weapon.

A ray of blue light flashed through the mist.\

The earthworm continued charging at Luo Yuan, wriggling like a thundering whip on the ground. The air grew more dense around him. His clothes fluttered aggressively as a gust of wind blew right at him, pushing him back. Luo Yuan remained unfazed and focused.

That's when an unexpected mutation started taking place.

A visible crack split the earthworm right in the middle of its torso, tearing it further apart as it kept moving. The earthworm was cut into two equal parts, creating two earthworms with flat-ended tails that glowed blue as they begun releasing white fumes.

The surrounding oxygen became thin and the toxins started crystallizing in midair.

Sodium-colored mollusk started forming on the earthworms' wounds, hardening almost instantly and slowing down the two creatures. Their tails hit the ground and shattered the mollusks into tiny pieces of crystals which began morphing into more earthworms.

An earthworm can survive as long as the slightest segment of its body survives. It can't be killed by slicing and dicing. I guess the best way for me to defeat it is to use my sword's freezing ability.

The earthworms kept secreting extremely corrosive blue slime—one drip on the ground and the earth sizzled, forming a sticky form of molten mud. Rocks and trees alike shrivelled when they came into contact with the slime, melting and becoming one with the molten mud pile. It didn't take long for a molten swamp to start forming around the earthworms as they wriggled in sporadic motions, eventually slowing down thanks to the crystallized surface of the swamp that was shattered within moments.

F*ck! The sword's freezing ability can't seem to crystalize this blue rank beast entirely!

Wait, what the...

“ARE YOU TRYING TO ESCAPE?”

The molten swamp grew wider and wider as one segment of the earthworm's body began drilling into the ground.

Chapter 75: Disfigurement

Luo Yuan glanced across the area as he kicked a heavy rock. The rock flew about 7-8 meters away and fell into a wallow, causing mud to splash around. He kept kicking rocks until he suddenly rushed forward and stepped on a big rock, lifting himself up to get closer to the corrosive earthworm. The Zhanmadao penetrated silently the shiny, sticky body of the earthworm. Luo Yuan pulled the sword out before the earthworm had enough time to react, leaving a 2-meter wound on its body.

The worm had a very low IQ and was too distracted by the intense pain to try to escape. It was like an eel in the ashes. It kept jumping around crazily, its movements splashing mud everywhere. Luo Yuan tried to step back while the earthworm struggled, but he still got mud on himself. He felt itchy, and his face and the back of his hand hurt slightly. He instinctively touched his face and realized it was full of blood and pus. His scalp felt numb and he was sure his face had been disfigured, even though he did not have a mirror to check. He wiped his face and cursed, "Damn it!"

He kept on cursing, the thought of his disfigured face making him angry. Since the mutation outbreak had happened, he'd never gotten such a bad injury, even though he's gotten into a lot of fights. It had been quite dangerous, but he had always been the winner and he'd suffered minor injuries at worst. He had won most of the battles, so he was extremely mad to get injured now. His anger turned into motivation to kill.

The intention made his entire body shake. The Zhanmadao began to shine as it slowly became brighter. The mist in the air

coagulated immediately, high pressure occupying a big part of the area. The corrosive earthworms nearby seemed to be able to sense him and had all stopped jumping around. They just lay down anxiously as their bodies began to shake.

“Knife expertise +1”

There was a system notification sound, but Luo Yuan did not seem to hear it. He began to walk towards the worm while he watched it. His footsteps were strong and firm, and his face was full of blood. He looked like a monster crawling out of the hell. It felt like the two of them had exchanged identities. Luo Yuan had become the beast, while the worm had become a small, harmless reptile.

Luo Yuan took a few steps forward before he began to increase his speed. It only took a few leaps for him to reach the worm. His sword released a beam of blue light and this time he could literally feel its force. The blade sliced across the body of the worm like it wasn't even there. Luo Yuan pulled the sword back and cut through the worm's 10-meter body. The earthworm was shaking in fear. It seemed to have forgotten how to escape and just let Luo Yuan chop it.

In fact, a blue rank creature would not simply allow someone to hurt them without a fight. No matter how big it was though, the worm was still a powerless [Nematoda](#). These organisms were like big computers with very basic operating systems. You could control them as long as you had the ability to hack them. The corrosive earthworm was fully controlled by Luo Yuan as its body became a shell without a soul. Luo Yuan kept cutting it, even after

the knife had stopped shining.

The nematodes or roundworms constitute the phylum Nematoda. They are a diverse animal phylum inhabiting a broad range of environments.

It was too late for the earthworm to realize why its brain had gone blank. Its body had already been cut into numerous pieces and its internal organs were flowing out under the pressure of its thoracic cavity. The air was filled with an awful, choking smell. The worm twisted a few times until it stopped struggling. The massive blood loss was making it weaker. No matter how strong it was, it couldn't survive under the circumstances. A few minutes later, the system beeped.

“E+ Level Mission: Killing Corrosive Earthworm, Completed!”

“Duration: 10 minutes and 36 seconds”

“Mission Rating: Pass!”

“Basic Experience Reward 1600!”

“Average Evaluation, Experience Reward +0!”

Luo Yuan was relieved when he heard the sound of the system. His furious energy immediately faded away. Suddenly, the awful stench of the dead worm made him puke. When he stopped

retching, he got up from the ground and looked at the worm's parts. He felt horrified. He could not believe that it had just let him kill it without even trying to escape.

He suddenly seemed to remember something. He touched his face and realized there were several holes with blood on it. It was horrible. He could even put his finger into the holes. His face was extremely itchy. He could not bear it and just started scratching his skin. The more he scratched, the itchier he got. He got frustrated and scratched even harder. He even scratched some of his skin off while he kept bleeding. Fear crept into his head as he lost control of his mind. He was unable to control his emotions anymore. He began to run around like crazy.

“Luo Yuan! Where are you?” Suddenly, he heard Huang Jiahui's voice.

Luo Yuan was surprised and happy at the same time. “I'm here! Please, come over here!”

A moment later, Huang Jiahui drove over in the Desert Eagle, along with Huang Yuying and Wang Shishi, who both looked terrified. Huang Jiahui had only stayed in the underground chamber for a few minutes before she'd begun to feel worried. After a short hesitation, she couldn't wait anymore and decided to go find Luo Yuan. Huang Yuying tried to stop her, but she failed, so she was forced to follow her. She was aware of her own situation. It was clear that all her effort to gain their trust would be wasted if she stayed in the chamber. Everyone would shun her. Perhaps not even Huang Jiahui would help her anymore. Nobody would keep around someone who only cared about themselves in a critical

situation. What reason did she have to stay safe while everyone was out, trying their best to make things work?

Although Huang Jiahui was scared and she really did not want to go out, she'd much rather take that risk rather than get abandoned again. She walked very fast until she finally found Luo Yuan in the mist. She was shocked at how pitiful he looked. "What happened to your face?" she asked. Wang Shishi screamed upon she seeing him.

"What's wrong with my face?" Luo Yuan asked, grabbing Huang Jiahui's hand. Their reaction made him nervous.

"It's full of blood!" Huang Jiahui said anxiously.

"Am I disfigured?" Luo Yuan asked nervously. He looked close to tears.

"I'm not sure, there's poisonous mist everywhere. Let's get back home first." Huang Jiahui helped him up and supported him. She felt that something was wrong with Luo Yuan. Although people usually tended to get super nervous about their faces getting disfigured, Luo Yuan was not that kind of person. The way he'd reacted had reminded her of an extremely vain woman.

Huang Yuying wanted to laugh, but she did not dare to. Although Luo Yuan looked quite hideous with all that blood on his face, she would not have felt any less nervous if he'd looked like a normal person. She hesitated for a moment before she moved forward to help him. A high-pitch sound penetrated the sky like a car honk

being pressed continuously. Suddenly, a strong wind blew above their heads as something fell down from the sky. The four of them raised their heads to check and saw a flame traveling down the sky through the mist, blasting somewhere in the distance.

“A bomb!”

A gigantic mass of red smoke rose up with an extremely loud sound and caused the ground to shake. They could hear the roaring sound of beasts. Luo Yuan turned pale while his entire body shook.

Chapter 76: Beast Attack

The whole city was covered by the thick smoke, and so was the military base. The military defense power had dropped to its lowest point. If a big group of beasts were to attack the city, there wouldn't be enough manpower to defend it. Luo Yuan's brain was blank from fear.

“Is that a bomb that exploded over there?” Huang Jiahui asked after a few minutes of stunned silence.

“I think so,” Huang Yuying said. She looked lost too.

“Let's go! Don't look anymore. Let's go back!” Luo Yuan said, jumping back into action.

The four of them felt cold as they quickly headed back to the villa, following the route they had taken there. They could hear the roars of beasts at the same time that the ground was shaking like there was an earthquake going on. Their house was in the West District, about 25 kilometers away from the outskirts of the city. They could still hear the roars clearly despite the distance. Apparently, the mutated beasts had entered the city. They could also hear the sound of shooting and minor bombing activities, but no one could tell whether it was working in the haze of it all. The four of them quickly entered the villa and shut the door.

They felt relieved. The house provided them protection and security, even though they knew it was not the safest way to defend against a mutated beast attack. Wang Shishi looked very

pale. She kept shaking, and she would surely have fallen down on the floor, had she not been leaning against the wall. Luo Yuan did not look any better. His determination was lower than average and his condition was worse than Wang Shishi's. He looked in pain, and occasionally anxious and afraid. He was about to have an emotional breakdown.

“Hurry up! Please get some water!” Huang Jiahui told Huang Yuying as she began to take his shirt off.

“Sure!” Huang Yuying replied nervously before she rushed to the kitchen.

Luo Yuan's shirt was made of blue rank black owl feathers and the material was shiny and waterproof. Liquid had never penetrated it, even though Luo Yuan had spilled mud on it several times. There was not a single piece of dirt on it. His skin, however, was another story. Huang Yuying brought water from the kitchen. Huang Jiahui took the cloth from the pail and helped Luo Yuan wipe away the blood and dirt carefully. She inhaled a mouthful of cool air to calm herself down. He looked terrible.

His entire face was terribly injured. There were holes and blood all over it. Corrosive mud covered almost all of the holes. Huang Jiahui was able to see his flesh after wiping off all the pus. She could even see his bones through some of the holes. Luo Yuan was still bleeding. She helped him clean up, the water inside the pail slowly turning red in the process. Luo Yuan howled in pain. Huang Jiahui could not hold her tears back anymore. She stopped wiping for a few minutes. When she lifted the cloth, Wang Shishi also forgot about her fear and started sobbing in the corner. They had

changed the water several times. Suddenly, they heard the sound of an explosion along with the furious roars of beasts. All of them looked hopeless as their faces turned pale.

“What should we do? The beasts are coming, we are going to die! I don’t want to die, I haven’t even had sex yet! I don’t want to die!” Wang Shishi said anxiously.

“Don’t be afraid, we will be fine! Remember how dangerous it was in Donghu City? We still survived! This time will be the same. We will survive, we just need to think positive!” Huang Jiahui said as she took Wang Shishi into her arms with teary eyes.

“Yes! We won’t die. There are so many people in Hedong City, we can’t be that unlucky. The house is strong, we will be fine,” Huang Yuying whispered. She was trying to comfort herself more than Wang Shishi.

Luo Yuan got up from the floor and said loudly, "Let's go to the underground chamber! The space is smaller, but it's stronger and there's also a lot of food. As long as there is ventilation, we can survive there for a few months, even if the house collapses."

Luo Yuan would not have made such a decision, had he been his usual determined self. He was the kind of person who took control of his destiny and did not succumb fate. However, he was really afraid and was not in control of his emotions anymore. All he wanted was to get someplace safe. He took his knife and ran down towards the underground chamber. The rest of them quickly followed him. When the door was shut, they were left in the dark. Huang Jiahui found her torchlight and switched it on. The white

light shined bright in the dark, providing some comfort. Wang Shishi had clutched Luo Yuan's arm the moment they'd gotten there and had not let go since. They all sat down in the corner.

The roaring sounds were getting clearer as the cement on the walls and ceiling kept dropping on their heads. They heard the sound of bricks falling on the outside as well as the screams of someone dying. Nobody knew who started shaking first, but it soon became contagious. All of them cuddled close together. At the beginning, they'd tried to talk and comfort each other, but no one was bothering anymore. They were too afraid that the beasts would hear them. In the end, they switched off the torchlight. The room filled with the sound of their heavy breathing.

Luo Yuan closed his eyes and meditated like he used to do, trying to focus his mind. He knew it was not normal for him to behave like that, so he decided to meditate and seek the peace inside his heart. Luckily he had a few months of practice and could reach that state of mind. Although this time was a lot more difficult than usual, he was able to slowly regain his focus.

Boom!

The chamber started shaking vigorously. The three women covered their mouths. They were too worried the beasts would hear them. They were all afraid. Luo Yuan suddenly opened his eyes and thought, "Damn! The house is collapsing, the beasts are coming in."

The sound of heavy footsteps was drawing closer along with the sounds of objects falling and breaking. They could hear someone

banging and stomping around, and the sound of partitions collapsing. The beast was gigantic. Luo Yuan estimated that it was about 3 meters tall and 7-8 meters long, and weighed about 20 tons. Every single step it took caused dust to drop from the ceiling as the building shook vigorously. The house seemed quite strong though. Had it been a condominium, there would have been cracks and gaps in the walls and it might have already collapsed. There was not even a single crack in the underground chamber. The beast was sniffing as it tried to find the trail of its prey.

No one dared move or make a single sound, but they all kept shaking. The stressful power of the blue rank organism nearly made them faint. After a while, they heard the sound of water dripping and inhaled the choking smell of urine. Luo Yuan was holding his knife tightly. The system beeped again but he did not bother checking it.

He was still in a recovering stage, both physically and mentally, and he had several minor injuries on his body. He was not confident that he could kill a blue rank beast. After all, humans were physically weaker than mutants. He was taking a huge risk every single time he fought against a blue rank animal. Unless he wanted to die, he could not afford any mistakes. He could not just rush out and kill the beast. That might draw the attention of other beasts nearby. The only way to protect everyone was to stay inside the chamber. Hopefully, the beast would not smell their scent and would leave the house as soon as possible.

Chapter 77: The Great War

As time went by, everyone was relieved to hear the sound of footsteps fade away. After the beast left, they all lay on the ground like exhausted construction workers. They could still hear roars from the outside as well as the sound of bomb explosions and humans screaming. All that noise was like a heavy dark cloud pressing down on them. Luo Yuan continued to meditate. It was horribly quiet in the chamber and the bombing sounds were getting louder and more frequent. They heard the sound of fighting jets passing by and the hustle and bustle of the city. The frequency of the battles was getting higher. Luo Yuan could even smell the smoke of guns.

“The army has focused their attacks and increased the frequency. They even brought out the fighting jets. The poisonous mist must be gone,” Luo Yuan whispered before he opened his eyes and looked around seriously.

He thought the war had to come to an end soon if the poisonous mist was gone and the army had began to attack. In fact, the war continued from morning till evening. and did not stop until night time. Apparently, the situation was worse than he had imagined. Fighting at night was not as effective. It only caused more injuries and deaths. However, Hedong City was too important to the province. Most factories had moved there because other places in the province had been in ruins since the mutation outbreak. Hedong City had become the new heavy industry and scientific study center in just a few months. The entire Jiangnan Province would be evacuated if Hedong City was conquered and the whole province would be taken over by green forest.

There was a lot of food in the chamber, but everyone seemed to have lost their appetite. They had a snack and then squeezed back in the corner together. The chamber became darker during the night. Luo Yuan's face felt itchy. He touched it with his hand and realized there were a lot more holes on it. It had been almost twelve hours since the morning. The blood on his wounds had coagulated, and he felt a slight pain whenever he touched it. Any normal person would be worried about getting disfigured. Luo Yuan felt mad and upset every time he thought about the volcanic craters on his face.

“Do you think it will end tomorrow?” Wang Shishi asked uncertainly as she opened her eyes wide in the dark.

“Don't be afraid, Shishi. The army is fighting the mutants, I think everything will be alright by tomorrow. There are about 100,000 soldiers based in Hedong City, 200,000 if we add the veterans who were recruited again. The defense system was weak because of the mist, but now that the mist is gone, it will be easier to kill them,” Huang Jiahui whispered.

“Brother Luo, Sister Huang, is that true?”

Luo Yuan remained silent for a second. Then he said, “Yes. Perhaps it will all be over when we wake up tomorrow morning.”

It would really end so soon? Luo Yuan did not know why, but he had a bad instinct. He did not believe that it was a coincidence that the beasts had attacked the city during all this chaos. The probability was relatively low. It seemed like someone had been behind this. While the mutants grew stronger, their intelligence

became higher as well. Luo Yuan had bumped into several mutated beasts before and realized their intelligence was a lot more advanced than that of regular mutants. They still had the intelligence of beasts though, which was why it was difficult to determine whether biological conflict was possible. He suspected that the beasts' mutated genes could break the restrictions of their intelligence and turn them into highly intelligent beasts, or even give them the power to control a whole group of mutated beasts. Luo Yuan shivered involuntarily at the thought. It would be really horrible if that turned out to be true.

Creatures with similar intelligence to human beings were a lot scarier than just physically superior, gigantic mutants. In millions of years of history, human beings had managed to occupy the top of the food chain on the earth, and had even left the earth to explore other planets nearby. The key to all those breakthroughs was not their size or physical strength, but their intelligence. It might not be something tangible, but it was still the core element and motivation for human development and evolution. A new highly-intelligent species would be a threat to the human race. Wang Shishi calmed down when she heard Luo Yuan's words. Luo Yuan sighed. There were too many things on his mind. The bombing sounds started fading at midnight.

The next morning, Luo Yuan opened his eyes and moved his arms and legs. He listened to the bombing sounds outside and realized it was getting more serious than ever. The choking smoke of the bombs and guns carried the awful smell of blood. The girls slowly woke up and heard the turmoil outside. Their rosy cheeks instantly turned pale. After a while, Luo Yuan got up and said, "Let's check it out."

“Please be careful!” Huang Jiahui spoke after a short silence.

Luo Yuan nodded and stepped out the chamber holding his knife. A big wave of heat greeted him as soon as he opened the trapdoor. He frowned as he walked out of the bathroom. The entire house had been terribly damaged. It looked like a Grade 12 typhoon had just passed by. There were deep, big footprints on the rocks and limestones as well as several big holes in the walls. The pillar in the living room, which was about half a meter in diameter, had snapped and formed an accidental V as it supported the house. Besides that, there were numerous big cracks on the ceiling, some of them the size of a fist. However, Luo Yuan did not pay much attention to the mess.

He saw a lot of destroyed buildings as he peeped through the holes caused by the beast’s attack. There were black clouds gushing up from the ground, accompanied by red flames and bombing sounds. He looked towards the direction of the districts and saw an upside down, dented, scraped tank with its belt spinning continuously in the air.

Suddenly a 5-meter tall rhino-like beast came out of the back of a building. It walked a few steps before it was suddenly attacked by a fighting jet. Blood gushed out from its body as it roared hopelessly before it slumped down on the ground. Its entire body was shaking. When the battle ended, the fighting jets flew past the sky above the district. Suddenly, they got hit by a huge rock thrown from a tall corporate office building. The jets exploded into the air.

A gigantic red gorilla was standing on the rooftop of the corporate building. It jumped onto the ground from the burning

building, creating a deep crater on the road. It kept beating its chest like a big drum. The gorilla was about 10 meters tall with a body of red fur. It looked like it was on fire while it walked down the street. Luo Yuan took a deep breath and stepped back instinctively. Even though the gorilla was a few miles away, he was still terrified. It had to be a blue or even higher rank creature.

A woman with blood stains on her body rushed out from the corporate building. She immediately got frightened by the scary scene in front of her and fell to the ground. A strong wind blew across the street as the woman was captured inside a huge palm and stuffed into a big dark oral cavity. Luo Yuan could hear the woman's hopeless screams. At that moment, two fighting jets came, aimed at the gorilla and started firing non-stop.

The beast covered its eyes with its huge palm and let the fighting jets attack its body. Barrage appeared around it as the gorilla kept stepping back. It roared extremely loudly before it finally came to a stop. The next second, a cluster of open-air missiles were released. They hit the gorilla and exploded.

Chapter 78: Wealth From The War

The strong force of the explosion spread and caused the buildings nearby to shake vigorously. Broken glass dropped from their windows. A very loud roar came from the burning flames. Luo Yuan was about to relax when he saw a blurry gigantic shadow walk out of the flames. It shook its body and suddenly the flames were gone. It seemed to be injured. There was a big black hole on its chest, and blood kept gushing out of the wound, turning the street into a big bloody puddle.

The wound was not deep, which actually made Luo Yuan feel nervous. It was not even half a meter deep, which meant that it was hard to penetrate the beast's body. The beast was about 2 meters thick, so the hole was a small wound compared to its size. He could not believe the missiles that could penetrate strong heavy tanks could not damage mere flesh and blood. Luo Yuan held his knife tightly as he turned pale. He was shocked to discover there was such a legendary creature living on earth. It seemed to go against the rules of nature.

The gorilla's head had to be hurt because the creature kept hitting it. It seemed to have totally forgotten that there were two fighting jets still lingering above its head. It took a few steps before a missile was suddenly released and hit its body again. It was followed by a second one and a third one. Mushroom-like clouds formed on the ground after the explosion. An eight-story building nearby did not survive the multiple explosion assault and collapsed. The two fighting jets that were still lingering above the gorilla flew away. The area became temporarily quiet.

Luo Yuan continued to wait for a while. His heart beat fast as he

realized that the battle was over. Blood was gushing up to his face as his body felt agitated. A corpse from a blue or higher rank animal was very rare and valuable. Luo Yuan had been fortunate enough to get a few scales from a giant snake, which he had used to upgrade his knife.

Besides, blue rank flesh and blood were much more effective for evolution than other mutated organisms. They were extremely attractive to Luo Yuan, who wanted to evolve. Just a bit of the beast's blood and flesh would be more than enough. This was an opportunity he could not pass up. Although he might not be regret for the rest of his life, he would still be depressed for a few days if he missed it. He observed his surroundings for a short while and then squeezed out from a hole by curving his body. He was moving at a high speed, but he was light and did not make any sound when he landed. His 13-point Dexterity made him move as efficiently as a cat. Every once in awhile, he stopped to check whether he should proceed. The district had become a very dangerous place.

He saw many dead mutants along the way, but most of them were white or light blue rank. He only saw one blue rank corpse and it was an amphibian. Half of its body had been bombed, but it seemed to be very strong. It was still alive and struggling to run away. Luo Yuan did not get any closer to it. He already knew there was a bigger blue rank corpse waiting for him. Therefore, this blue rank mutant was of no interest to him.

After a few minutes, he was out of the district. He noticed that the buildings on both sides of the road were full of cracks and there were shards of glass and stones scattered all over the street. Suddenly, he found something that looked like a split intestine by the roadside, next to a pile of crushed flesh. His excitement was

replaced by fear. He did not know how many people had lost their lives during the battle and he had no idea how many people would survive the war. He could not even tell whether humans would win this battle. He could still hear the beasts roaring somewhere in the distance. The beasts' roars, the uprising barrage and the flying fighting jets meant that the beasts were still on their way to enter the city.

Luo Yuan took a deep breath and suppressed the fear inside him. He quickly picked up his pace. He knew it would not be safe for him to stay around long. Another group of beasts would be coming soon and he needed to take the opportunity and collect the meat and flesh he wanted. If he missed it, he might not get another chance, or even be able to escape from the district. After a few minutes, he finally found the big corpse lying on the street. He realized a 12-storey building had collapsed and the dead body had landed there after falling through its tower. The tower was still full of smoke. Strong explosions had destroyed the whole area. There was no street intact anymore.

When he reached the giant corpse, Luo Yuan suddenly found it difficult to breathe. He felt like a big rock was pressing down on his chest. He had only felt that kind of stress when he'd been standing in front of the giant snake. However, this was the first time he was standing so close to a gigantic gorilla. Its body was huge. It was about 3 meters tall, even while it lay on its side. Its big muscles, sharp fangs, and rough palms looked intimidating. What was incredible though, was the gorilla's fur. It looked perfectly fine under the high temperature of the fire, and even seemed to move when the wind blew on it.

The regions that were not covered by fur were extremely rough,

with layers of overlapping scales. Or maybe that was dead skin. The scales were the size of longan fruit, but their shape resembled a tiny pyramid with different patterns. There were two wounds on the gorilla's body, a small one and a larger one. The big wound was the one created by the missiles. Apparently, two missiles had penetrated the exact same spot, forming a wound about the size of a round dining table. Most of the organs inside its thoracic cavity were gone.

Luo Yuan did not lose time. He quickly pulled out the Zhanmadao and jumped on the beast's palm. It took him a few leaps before he got up to its chest. It was a challenge for him to stand on its body while the gorilla's heart was still beating. Its body had not gone completely stiff yet, and its skin was still soft and elastic. What freaked him out was the sudden twitching movements caused by internal nerve stimulation. He took a deep breath and controlled his own heartbeat before he slit its throat with the Zhanmadao. Since the Zhanmadao had been upgraded to dark blue level, there was nothing it could not break. Even steel was like wet clay against it. However, he found it difficult to move the sword once it had penetrated the skin. It felt like the blade had been wedged between the beast's muscles.

He had expected that. Luo Yuan pulled out his sword and cut on the same spot again, this time harder than the last. He continued to repeat the same strikes, each one faster and more accurate than the previous ones. He completed about 30 strikes in just five seconds. The beast's entire neck had been chopped into two. The white bones of the gorilla were exposed to the air but sadly, the Zhanmadao could not continue its job. The collision of the blade and the bones would produce a high-pitch sound. Luo Yuan decided to stop as he was too worried about his sword getting damaged. Suddenly, a strong energy came out of his body and the

blade of the Zhanmadao instantly shone.

He realized the sword could agglomerate energy faster than ever and was way shinier than last time. He had no time to think about it further. He lifted the sword in the air and gathered all his energy, using every single bit of it to strike the gorilla's neck again. A loud sound came from the gorilla while its neck was broken. Luo Yuan felt his brain go blank for a second as his limbs went numb. He did not dare look at the beast any longer. He just grabbed the fur on its skull and dragged the heavy skull all the way back home.

Chapter 79: Flaming Cloud

Luo Yuan spent about 15 minutes trying to drag the skull back to the house. The skull was too big to fit through the entrance of the chamber, so he had to leave it in the living room. Apparently, the Zhanmadao was not suitable for skull dissecting. It was not a heavy weapon and its blade was too thin and weak for strong, hard objects like bones. Of course, it could use its power to do that, but it was too dangerous. It could burn out at any time under such dangerous circumstances.

He found an ax inside the house, put it on the neck bone of the gorilla, and started to cast a spell. The brightness on the bone immediately faded and became a dull white. It looked like it had just been oxidized. Several tiny pores appeared on its surface. At the same time, the temperature of the ax started to increase and it began to burn his hand.

Although the ax was covered by a layer of red paint, underneath that layer it had become very smooth and shiny. No one would believe it was an ax unless they had seen it evolve themselves. Most people would think that it was jade carved into the shape of an ax. Luo Yuan picked up the ax and realized it had gotten heavier. The weight was just perfect for him.

‘Strong Skeleton Axe.’

‘Material: Alloy, Gorilla Bone.’

‘Rarity: Dark Blue. ‘

‘Weight: 5.3kg.’

‘Power: 32-35’

‘Complementary property 1: Attack Speed -1’

‘Complementary property 2: Explosive Attack. The strongest attack power. Cooldown time: 24 hours.’

‘Equipment Requirements: 11-point Power’

‘Comments: This is a very powerful ax!’

The characteristics of the ax had become scarier after it had evolved. It had even surpassed in power the Zhanmadao. Although its first complementary property was a bit disappointing, Luo Yuan was amazed by the second one. The key was that it didn’t have many restrictions. For example, the Zhanmadao required knife expertise for someone to use it. Of course, the only downside was that he could only rely on his fate for the ax to attack explosively. However, the ax had already been a very powerful weapon even before it had reached this optimum stage.

The diameter of the skull was about 1.2 or 1.3 meters, which was sufficient to produce 4-5 strong weapons. However, that was not the first time he had thought about that. He lifted the ax and

chopped down the skull, producing a strong, high-pitch sound as flesh and blood spilled all over the place.

When Luo Yuan had hit it about ten times, a light flashed across. His face suddenly turned red as the image of a roaring mad gorilla crept into his mind. He suddenly felt extremely mad and furious. He opened his mouth involuntarily and roared like a gorilla.

His body shook a little as a strong energy was released from it. Suddenly, his muscles began to expand, and so did his veins and arteries. He instantly became tall and huge, and his eyes turned red. The soul of the gorilla seemed to be possessing his body. He felt extremely furious as he lifted the ax with both his hands and chopped down the skull once again. There was a big crack on its surface and after that second hit, it broke.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The living room filled with noise as he seemed to have no other way to release his madness. After a while, he slowly became more rational and his anger subsided. He thought there would be some side effects from the evolution, but fortunately, he was not exhausted. He felt relaxed and comfortable, just like he did after taking a hot shower. The depression and frustration he had felt previously were all gone as well. The explosive attack did not seem to rely on his own power but on the ax itself.

Luo Yuan picked up the ax and checked it out. He noticed two big cracks on it, which meant its power had been almost fully consumed. Luo Yuan had expected this. However, the axe was not broken, even though it had collided with a similar object several

times. The entire skull of the gorilla was destroyed. Luo Yuan found some sealable bags in the kitchen and poured the cerebral fluids and the mashed brain into one of them. He realized there were more than 10 bags on the floor when he was done.

He brought all the bags to the underground chamber. He noticed the women look at him curiously as he was about to close the door. He hesitated, and then shook his head with a sad expression. He remained silent as he opened up the bag with the mashed brain. He put the mashed brain into a pot and its awful smell immediately took over the entire chamber. Huang Jiahui got up from the ground with a pained expression. She was going to use mineral water to wash a few empty cans left over from their last dinner.

“No, don’t use the mineral water! There is no water supply anymore, try not to use our drinking water,” Luo Yuan stopped her.

He had checked on the water and gas supply when he had gone to the kitchen earlier, and realized there was no water and gas anymore. The two cartons of mineral water in the underground chamber were their only source of drinking water. Her hand that was about to twist the bottle cap stopped immediately. She slowly put down the bottle and said, “Luo Yuan, don’t lie to us. How bad is the situation outside?”

Luo Yuan shook his head and said, “It’s terrible. The beasts are entering the city and they do not seem to be slowing down. I think the battle will go on tomorrow, maybe even the day after tomorrow. The only question now is whether humans have enough bullets to kill all the beasts.”

Everyone turned even paler than before. Luo Yuan grabbed the bag with the mashed brain and poured it into four cans. He then took one of the cans and slowly drank it. The awful smell of the mashed brain formed a strange combination with the leftover food from the can, but he did not register it at all. Huang Jiahui also took one. She closed her eyes and held her breath before she swallowed it quickly. Then she poured some more into her can.

Wang Shishi hesitated. She had a suffering expression on her face, but she drank it quickly as well. Huang Yuying felt extremely uncomfortable watching the three of them drink that awful red liquid. It certainly did not look like food. She asked curiously, “What’s this?”

Luo Yuan looked at her for a second before he said, “Fresh mashed brain of a mutated beast. It’s good for you if you drink it.”

Luo Yuan did not think very highly of her. She was making an effort and being nice to all of them though, so he tolerated her existence. Anyway, she had joined them now, so it would not be nice to just boycott her. Plus, it was no longer a secret that the flesh and blood of mutants were the key to evolution. Those smart enough had already known about it. However, even though many knew the secret, there were only a few people who had managed to evolve. It had nothing to do with the wealth or status, it was just pure luck. Huang Yuying looked shocked and her face became very pale when she realised that this was the brain of a beast. She immediately covered her mouth to prevent herself from vomiting.

Huang Jihui looked at poor Huang Yuying and recalled eating

that awful thing for the first time. She put down her can and said, "It's okay. Don't smell or don't taste it. Just swallow it when you put it into your mouth."

Regardless of how kind she had used to be, going through a horrible experience had made her stronger. Luo Yuan and Huang Jiahui's advice reminded her of the rumors. She knew the importance of power and strength, especially when justice could not protect her. She did not hesitate any longer. She just took a can of mashed brain and drank it. When she was done, she looked really sick and she remained silent. Luo Yuan looked at her and thought she was a brave one. Only brave people would be able to survive through this chaos. Then he looked at Wang Shishi, who was puking, and shook his head in disappointment.

Luo Yuan was the only one who didn't feel like his body was burning. The rest of them felt dizzy and had a terrible headache. Luckily, Luo Yuan had explained to them the side effects of eating the mashed brain. Otherwise, they would have been in a lot more pain. In fact, it felt a lot worse compared to the time Luo Yuan had eaten the brain of the mutated Rat King. Except Huang Jia Hui, the two other girls were crying and screaming like nobody was watching. About 30 minutes later, they started to feel better.

Luo Yuan sighed. He could not see any sign of evolution on them or himself. It had not worked. The probability of evolution was too low. However, they did not seem to be depressed. They actually looked quite excited. Wang Shishi kept jumping up and down. Luo Yuan suddenly said, "Shishi, let's try your power!"

Wang Shishi nodded excitedly. Several cans of food flew into the

air when she pointed her finger at them. They kept moving faster and faster until she closed her eyes and a strong wind appeared in the chamber. The other two girls could not resist its force and stood aside. Wang Shishi attempted to move something heavier. She aimed at a box of wine and began to chant. The box began to move and then flew into the air. She knew she could do better. She moved a box of Coca-Colas, and then a box of Sprites. Last but not least, she lifted a box of mineral water bottles. There was a total of four boxes of wine and drinks spinning around her. Unfortunately, her speed got a lot slower. She began to sweat after a few rounds of spinning and quickly put down the stuff. Huang Jiahui and Huang Yuying were amazed. They sighed instantly when Wang Shishi could not continue. Half of their excitement was gone.

"These things exceed the limit of the weight she had been able handle, so at least she has upgraded her power. Now I know that concentration and sensory perception are related, maybe even the evolution of sensory perception. Even if they are not, sensory perception has to be a factor." He instantly felt inspired.

"Are you alright?" Luo Yuan asked when he noticed Wang Shishi holding her head.

"Oh, I overused my strength and feel a little bit of a headache now," Wang Shishi replied as she smiled sweetly at Luo Yuan. She did not look like she was having a headache.

"Pass me your shuttle, I'll help you modify it," Luo Yuan said as he remembered the giant skull outside.

"Brother Luo, could you make a nicer one? The last one was

really ugly,” Wang Shishi said excitedly.

“Looks don’t matter, what matters is functionality. Even if I make it nicer, it will just be a toy in your hands,” Luo Yuan lectured her.

Wang Shishi quickly lowered her chin and stopped talking.

“Huang Jiahui, could you pass me the bullets you have?”

Huang Jiahui nodded excitedly. She took out a few boxes of bullets from her pocket together with the Desert Eagle. She removed all the bullets and passed them to Luo Yuan. There were many materials, including dark blue rank bullets, which could easily kill mutants lower than dark blue rank. They could be killed with one shot if the killer aimed at their weakest point. However, an experiment was necessary in order to prove it. If it worked, Luo Yuan planned on upgrading all the bullets to dark blue rank for Huang Jiahui. That way, she might be able to perform better at the critical moment.

It was overwhelming for him to fight alone and it would be extremely dangerous if they bumped into a group of mutants. Initially, he had wanted to modify some clothes, but in the end he gave up that thought. He knew the gorilla’s skull would not be suitable for that. Using identification, he discovered that the gorilla did not have any specific properties. Although it could be used to make clothes, its protection was relatively low. His speed would be lowered if he lost the wind properties, which meant that his power would be diminished. They only needed enough protection to prevent the bullets from penetrating their bodies.

In fact, there was no way to avoid an attack by a dark blue rank mutated beast. Even though the powerful clothes would not break, the human body would not be able to withstand such an attack. Thus, why not modify the bullets and the weapons? Luo Yuan walked out from the underground chamber and realized the temperature outside was even higher than before. He felt depressed and proceeded to check it out. He looked out through the big hole in the wall and was stunned for a while.

The sky had become red and barrage rose from the ground. The whole area looked like a sea of fire. Huge flames were swallowing everything in sight, and towers were burning and collapsing under the high temperature. Everything in the vicinity had been destroyed.

“A thermobaric bomb?” Luo Yuan said slowly as he shivered.

Chapter 80: Survival

Three large bombers were still dropping fuel-air bombs endlessly into the sea of fire, waves of flames rising and spreading. The waves from the explosions were never-ending as they blasted into the clouds.

Within a minute, the three bombers had already dropped nearly a hundred fuel-air bombs, blasting everything within several kilometers' radius into a sea of flame. Their destructive force was akin to a mini nuclear bomb.

Fuel-air bombs were also called "Asian Nuclears". It was inhumane to use such a blasting mechanism against living targets. Those killed by them died either of suffocation or high temperature. As the human race progressed, such explosives had been banned by the United Nations, much like biochemical weapons. It felt surreal to see them used again that day.

Hedong City had always had a stable environment. It had never experienced any serious threats. Due to the recent increase in population, the village near the defense works had been evacuated, and the outskirts, which were only marginally safe, had been flooded with people.

Even if the outskirts had been occupied by mutated beasts by now, there was probably still a large number of survivors.

Luo Yuan's face was pale as a sheet. It was clear to him that the military would never make such vicious attacks if they had a

choice. Everyone knew that the public outcry after a war had the ability to drown anyone.

Had Hedong City been forced into a corner?

Despite the fact that he was strong enough to battle a blue level mutated beast, he felt as desperate and as lost as anyone at that moment. His own strength seemed insignificant in this ferocious situation. Once Hedong City had fallen...

Luo Yuan watched in stupor for a moment before he turned towards the huge skull. He took a few steps, but tripped on a pile of mud. His machete flung out of his hand.

He stood up and picked it up, his hands shaking and his body trembling. He had stayed strong because he had not felt hopeless, but when faced with the possibility of no hope, no one could remain unaffected.

He took a deep breath and forced himself to stay calm.

He retrieved a synthesized dark blue level bullet and pushed it into the barrel. He aimed at a wall and pulled the trigger.

Bang!

A hole appeared on the wall after a deafening sound.

Luo Yuan went over to check. The hole was almost the same size as the bullet, which meant that the bullet had gone through the wall smoothly. The collision had not changed its shape. He nodded his head. He could go on synthesizing.

A few minutes later, white-jade colored bullets had formed a pile on the ground.

He only stood up after he had synthesized Wang Shishi's shuttle to dark blue level.

He had to do something. He could not bear this any longer. As he looked far away into the distance, the hesitant expression on his face was replaced by determination.

The world had gotten dangerous and unfamiliar. There was no longer an absolute safe place to hide. Instead of finding hiding spots or hiding in dark corners and waiting for death, it seemed logical to try his luck once again.

This threat could very well be his chance. Blue level mutated beasts, which were usually hard to find, were everywhere now, some of them so severely injured they were drawing their last breaths.

As long as he could trigger a mission.

It had always been a mystery to him how the system chose to assign certain missions. It never seemed to assign one without

reason.

After all this time, Luo Yuan had begun to notice a vague pattern. His assumption was finally confirmed. After the mutation had started, most of his missions had been related to killing mutated beasts.

Whether the system was some sort of developed technology or mysterious force, it still had to abide by the balance of energy. Each upgrade of energy into his body after leveling up must have originated from somewhere.

Before the mutation, missions were a few months apart and as his level increased, the time period between them had gotten shorter. He had inferred that the power was coming from himself as his appetite had increased significantly during that period; other than his own exertion, he guessed that part of his strength was used by the system for his level up.

Missions had been assigned far more frequently after the mutation, and it was a big possibility that some of the mutated beasts' special powers had been absorbed by the system. The reason behind the system's frequent missions were the strong mutated beasts that were around.

Assigning missions was just a tactic. The evolution of the host was the real motive here; and to evolve, the host needed to continuously absorb energy.

He got a roll of tape and taped the cuffs of his pants shut. The

outside seemed like the wild, filled with strange, dangerous mutated beasts – any recklessness could result in his death. He was not ready to head out. He did not feel calm enough yet.

He sat down on a decided spot and drew a light circle on the carpet with his machete, cutting the piece off easily.

He began to wipe the blade, again and again. With each wipe, his heart calmed and his breathing slowed. When his pulse had become faint, he stood up slowly.

He left the house briskly without a sound. The mutated frog by the entrance of the residential area lay motionless on the ground. If its body had not been convulsing from time to time, people would have thought that it was dead.

Luo Yuan approached it soundlessly and stabbed the machete into its head quick as lightning, twisting the blade. The pain made the mutated frog momentarily regain its consciousness before dying. Luo Yuan had already retreated several meters away before it could make a last attack. He left the outskirts of the residential area without giving the frog a second glance.

A large mutated boar was taking crippled steps down the street. Its body was filled with holes from the machine guns, its black fur dyed crimson red with blood as the beast moaned and cried. Two white clouds huffed from its nostrils as its green fist-sized eyes looked around warily.

Suddenly, a glass window on the third floor of a nearby building

cracked open. Among the glass shatters, there was a black shadow. A blue ray flashed and the next moment a blade sliced through the beast's head.

The shadow landed on the floor and sprang towards somewhere in the distance.

That's when the mutated beast reacted. It stopped angrily and turned its head in search of the human who had dared challenge it. Its head slid off its neck slowly, blood spraying out in jets under the pressure.

A little farther away, Luo Yuan was leaning against the junction of a wall, breathing heavily.

“This is the tenth blue level mutated beast and the third E Level Mission already! It's been too long for this craziness! I should be able to level up once I complete another mission!” The smirk on the corners of Luo Yuan's mouth went away as soon as it had appeared.

Perhaps it was the injuries he had already sustained by the mutated beasts, but no matter how well he had performed, all three missions of his had only been graded as 'Average'. However, they had also awarded him 4800 EXP. In addition to what he'd already had, his EXP was now 8900/9600, only 700 EXP until his next level up.

A few minutes later, the boar succumbed to its death. He approached it cautiously and began gulping down the blood

dripping down its headless neck.

The slightly salty copper blood had a hint of sweetness, a taste he had gotten used to after consuming it several times. He could even differentiate between the different types of beasts now.

His body boiled in crimson as he gulped down the fresh blood, his depleted energy recovering in an instant. It was his last resort for recovering his energy as mutated beasts possessed plenty of active energy that normal food lacked.

Had it not been for this, his energy would never have lasted him that long during a battle. Even if the battle was only a few seconds long, fully unleashing his power and strength was still a huge burden on his weak body.

He was slightly disappointed that he had not evolved, even after drinking so much blood from mutated beasts. He could only blame his bad luck for it.

After a while, his energy had reached its peak once again. He picked up his machete and walked down the street with light steps.

Ten minutes later, he suddenly stopped and changed direction, walking hurriedly towards another street.

Chapter 81: The Golden-Winged Roc

His steps quickened until he almost ended up sprinting.

He didn't need to lift his head to feel that he was being hunted by a mutated creature from above. A strong sense of danger made his scalp feel numb.

Luckily he was not in a spacious land, but inside a city. The high-rise buildings around him blocked the huge bird's vision, preventing it from attacking right away.

As he sprinted, Luo Yuan raised his head to take a look. It was indeed a gigantic creature, much larger than the Black Owl he had encountered last time. The creature spreading its wings was like a golden cloud hovering over the city.

It circled the air, looking for the best time to attack; its sharp eyes were watching the area like a cold hawk.

This was an uninjured mutated beast. Maybe it had been singled out from the battlefield, or had just come from another region. The system notification informed him that it was a Golden-Winged Roc, an energetic blue level mutated beast.

This was why Luo Yuan was sprinting down the street. The Golden-Winged Roc was his prey, but so was he to the roc. If it had been a dark blue level creature, he would have rushed into one of the buildings to hide.

Even so, Luo Yuan still felt an overwhelming sense of pressure.

That would not have been the case if it had been a blue level land creature; blue level beasts had always caused him a certain amount of pressure, but that did not include flying creatures. If Luo Yuan had to pinpoint which type of mutated beasts was the trickiest to handle, it would undoubtedly be flying mutated creatures. Flying creatures would always be more superior to land creatures, and most of the time they were really hard to fight.

Most importantly, Luo Yuan had never faced a flying creature and had zero experience against them.

He did not want to retreat though. This was a rare chance for him to level up by killing it. It would save him so much more time and effort than finding an injured mutated beast, which would not even guarantee a level up. It was more tempting to just do it and be done with it.

Besides, this was a blue level mutated beast.

He kept recalling how an eagle would catch a hare in nature, replaying the familiar scene in slow motion in his head again and again. Gradually, he slowed down and came to a stop in the middle of an empty shopping square.

Running would not only be useless, but also a waste of energy. When it came to this kind of creature, all one had to do was wait in anticipation.

The empty square lacked any disturbances. It was the best battlefield for both him and the Golden-Winged Roc.

He took a deep breath and looked at the sky.

Its golden wings, which were some ten meters wide, shone under the sunlight. While its circling speed got faster and faster, the diameter of the circles got smaller and smaller until finally, it retracted its wings to its sides and shot downwards. A second later, a boom was heard from the sky.

Its speed had broken the sound barrier, and a vapor cone had formed in midair. The strong sound waves shattered the windows on the nearby buildings.

“It’s coming!” Luo Yuan was startled, his gaze unwavering from the fast approaching giant bird while his hands grasped the handle of his machete. Adrenaline rushed in him as his heart thumped wildly.

His 13-point Dexterity was like a high speed camera. It caught the movement of the giant bird, yet it seemed pointless as the bird’s speed was too fast, almost bullet-like.

A long vapor cone had formed in the air, caused by its frightening speed. Sand and stones danced around as a strong wind blew before the bird had even come close to the ground. Luo Yuan’s skin felt like it was being pierced by knives.

The aggressive momentum made him want to run, but he understood well enough that it was not feasible anymore. His speed would never surpass the roc's, even if the nearest building was only less than a hundred meters away. He was unusually calm under the circumstances, and could not help but squint as his clothes flapped around in the wind.

100 meters, 50 meters, 20 meters... A pair of grey claws not unlike old tree roots extended from its stomach as sharp nails flashed like daggers. These claws could not doubt penetrate steel boards.

They looked like they were about to pierce through his body when Luo Yuan suddenly closed his eyes. He felt the roc's movement clear as day. There was nothing but its claws on his mind.

If he could avoid bullets, then he could avoid a giant bird too. It wasn't faster than a bullet after all.

His body tilted unconsciously, and a long sound pierced the air as he withdrew his machete; a cold shine flashed like lightning as the blade soundlessly slashed through the tough claws, detaching them from the roc's body.

Before the roc could feel any pain and react, Luo Yuan made his move again.

With a step strong enough to crush the square's sidewalk, his

shoulder collided against the roc's stomach.

Strength was a flexible attribute, unlike attributes like Intelligence or Dexterity that had almost zero flexibility; the average human strength and the strength of people who had undergone professional training differed vastly. There were famous wrestlers much stronger than Luo Yuan, but being 2.25 times stronger than average was not bad either.

The roc had seemed gigantic at first, but that had been mainly due to its wings. It was only about 3 meters tall without them. The roc was still in midair when it was thrown 5 – 6 meters away upon the brutal collision. It fell to the ground, where it lay on its back.

The bird cried sharply, making Luo Yuan's eardrums thrum.

It seemed to have finally come to its senses – this was not just food, this was a scary beast. The pain coming from its severed claws and natural danger instincts made it struggle wildly, its wings flapping and producing a strong wind.

Luo Yuan was not going to give it a chance to escape now that it was already on the ground.

Crouching and creeping, using both his arms and legs, he run like an arrow against the direction of the wind.

The 5-meter distance was closed within a breath but just as he reached it, the desperate Golden-Winged Roc flapped its wings

forcefully. The rapid collision between its feathers and the sidewalk created a several-meter high spark and an atmospheric pressure hemisphere. Even a marble table nearby had been blown away by the force. Just a touch of that force would be enough to blend flesh and blood into a gory mess.

Although Luo Yuan had been prepared, his breath was still caught. He dared not slow down though. He went ahead and slashed one of the roc's wings off with his machete. While he had managed to avoid a direct attack, he was still blown about ten meters away by the strong current of air.

He felt some moisture in his throat before he started puking blood.

Licking his blood-stained lips, he wiped them carelessly on his sleeve and looked at the footless roc with the one remaining wing. A chilling smirk formed on his face.

Birds without claws and wings obviously had reduced capabilities, but Luo Yuan was still cautious. His fragile body was always reminding him that he could never be too wary when battling mutated beasts. If he wasn't careful, he would get killed.

His gaze turned cold as he walked towards the roc, exuding a strong aura.

The roc was clearly disturbed by his aura. It cried and flapped its remaining wing continuously, but it was useless. Its lack of balance prevented it from flying. All it could do was roll around on the

square.

To prevent any additional problems from cropping up, Luo Yuan picked up his pace and dashed over.

He pulled out his machete and slashed through horizontally.

Another wing fell down.

He rolled to the side to avoid the incoming current of wind before his machete went for the Golden-Winged Roc's stomach. The dark blue level weapon stabbed through without obstruction and the blade twisted inside the roc's guts, following Luo Yuan's rolling motion and inflicting a spectacular wound.

The agonizing pain triggered the bird's bestiality, its sharp beak coming at him relentlessly. A bird's peck was akin to a snake's - extremely fast and unperceivable to the naked eye - one of the most lethal attacks, especially when coming from a blue level beast.

A deafening boom was heard.

Luo Yuan had barely enough time to tilt his body before he heard a second boom. A hole about the size of a skull appeared beside him. Sand and stones sprayed outwards, pricking his back that was already drenched in sweat from fear.

Pecking sounds came endlessly from his back. Luo Yuan had

managed to escape unscathed with a few rolls thanks to the restricted movement of the roc.

He wisely decided to temporarily hide and just watch the Golden-Winged Roc, which was slowly approaching its death.

About ten minutes later, the massive blood loss and twisted guts, as well as its excessive earlier movements, had weakened the roc considerably. As it lay listlessly on the ground, its eyes lost their shine and its eyelids sagged.

Just to be safe, Luo Yuan took out the Desert Eagle and pulled the trigger lightly as he aimed at the bird's head.

Its body trembled for some time before all signs of life disappeared. The synthesized dark blue level bullet had gone through its brain easily.

Chapter 82: Sympathy

The mission had only been graded as ‘Good’, but it was enough. After the completed mission notification, system notifications kept ringing continuously.

Character: Luo Yuan

Profession: Hunter

Level: 7

Experience: 1900

Attributes:-

Strength: 12 (10)

Dexterity: 13 (10)

Physique: 12 (10)

Intelligence: 13 (10)

Sensory Perception: 13 (10)

Willpower: 13 (10)

Skills: Science 16, Math 14, Mandarin 19, English 16, Finance 17,

Arithmetic 9, Dancing 1, Drawing 3, Gaming 6, Persuasion 9,

Socializing 7, Cooking 3, Driving 1, Hand-to-Hand Combat 4,

Excellent Knife Skill: 2, Gun Skill: 1

Special Skills: Identification, Synthesis

Unassigned AP: 1

Unassigned SP: 10

Incomplete Mission: None

Luo Yuan was once again in a dilemma about assigning his AP. It was different now, because there was nowhere absolutely safe. The city would soon be occupied by mutated beasts. He was not facing just one or two beasts now. He might not even have enough time to take a breath between battles.

To put it simply, he needed to have the strength to run when

facing a mutated beast he could not beat. He could not afford to be out of breath after just a few steps.

After some thought, he decided to assign all his AP to Physique.

The next moment, a heated flow filled him as his skin turned red and sweat drenched his entire body. Within a few seconds, he felt as if he was being burned. His face began to feel numb. It was the kind of numbness that felt like countless ants were biting him. He scratched his face lightly, only to see flakes of skin come off.

These were newly formed scabs from the previous day, and they still had dark red blood on them. He touched where he had scratched earlier and felt the smooth skin.

When the heat had subsided, he immediately checked the back of his hand where he had been burned earlier. The scabs had all flaked like a snake's scales, falling off once his hand brushed across them lightly. The uneven surface disappeared and was replaced by normal skin. He had recovered from all his injuries. Plus, his skin seemed smoother and fairer than before, glowing shiny like jade.

Even his scars had vanished during the heated flow.

He touched his skin, and the surface was smooth with an additional feeling of resilience. To test his assumption, he picked up a sharp stone and cut the back of his hand forcefully. Before, that much strength would definitely have caused a deep, bleeding gash.

The back of his hand hurt, even though only a layer of outer skin had been scraped off. When he removed the stone for inspection, there wasn't even the slightest bit of blood to be seen.

He was surprised, but also a little curious. Why did working out not have that kind of effect?

Before this, Luo Yuan's Physique had only come from working out. Nothing as strange as this had happened, other than an increase in his stamina.

Luo Yuan thought about it and came to a conclusion. The strength he'd gained from working out had to be temporary strength, much like a long-distance runner's. If he stopped working out, his strength would have decreased considerably, and been reduced back to an average person's in three years' time.

From a certain perspective, the strength and physique of a long distance runner were not that much different from an average person's. Even if the runner had gone through excruciating training to get a little stronger than the average person, his physique would still not have changed. It was a totally different case with the system though. It increased the body's attributes from within the cells, which explained why fixed attributes like Intelligence could be increased.

Luo Yuan guessed that this had not just increased his strength, but also other things like the resilience of his skin, his ability to self-heal, even his age.

He tightened his fist and felt endless energy running through his body. He was delighted. He would not have to hesitate anymore during a battle in the future.

He looked at his 10 collected AP. His knife skill had already reached Excellent. The effect of practicing was no longer obvious. He had noted no significant improvement after practicing for half a month. He did not hesitate in adding all his AP to his knife skill. Times were grim, and any extra capability was an additional assurance of safety.

Countless knowledge flooded his brain in only a moment.

His eyes turned foggy as a frightening aura exuded from him. Even the air seemed to tense. A few seconds later, he reopened his eyes, and the pair of them flashed out of nowhere. He extracted his machete, and the knife shone with a mist-like effect, its glow covering the whole blade.

As his aura got stronger, the shine of the blade got stronger as well, becoming visible even in broad daylight. The shine had gotten almost an inch longer, the air around it hissing as if it was being sliced.

Luo Yuan smiled lightly. The glow grew weak in an instant, leaving behind only a thin layer. He drew a stroke across the ground.

It didn't make a sound.

The next second, the ground was split open in a smooth straight line.

Going from Excellent Knife Skill 2 to Excellent Knife Skill 12 had not just made the blade's glow stronger, but it had also allowed Luo Yuan to use it without depleting much of his Willpower.

Before Luo Yuan left, he drank a few more mouthfuls of the Golden-Winged Roc's blood. Nothing changed.

He was not disappointed. He'd already gotten used to it.

Evolving was an extra perk for him, the system was his foundation.

Even if he did not become an evolved person, he believed he still would not be any weaker than the lucky people who did.

The battle in the distance was still ongoing, but there were less bombers in the sky. There was only 30 – 40 of them now, when it had been over a hundred the previous day. A large number of mutated beasts circled around in the sky, and a few bombers fell from time to time. It looked like the mutated beasts were winning.

As Luo Yuan passed down the street, several heavy military trucks drove by fast, a grey cloth covering their backs, which were filled up to a mound. Luo Yuan wondered what was inside as he glanced at them. The soldiers driving them looked passive and spiritless.

Noticing Luo Yuan, one of them turned his head to look at him, his gaze tinged with sympathy and pity.

Luo Yuan took a long look at the heavy trucks driving away, his mind replaying the soldier's expression. He had a bad feeling about it, yet nothing came to him, no matter how long he pondered it. He went on his way. About ten minutes later, he came to a halting stop before a food market. He looked at it dumbfoundedly.

The metal gates were open wide, and the inside of the market was empty, like a robbery had just taken place. He walked inside in disbelief. The huge warehouse had been cleared of its contents, leaving only a few grains of rice in the inventory. He suddenly thought of the heavy trucks he'd just seen. His face paled.

He stood there for a few minutes stunned, losing all his spirit.

His mind was working in overdrive.

“Why was the food moved?”

“What did that soldier's gaze mean?”

“Where are the trucks going?”

Luo Yuan dared not think about the answers to the first and second question. It would only make him feel hopeless. As for the

third question, he had nothing. If the military was leaving Hedong City, they could only do it through the only lifeline left – the highway.

What about Hedong City and its hundreds of thousands of people, though? What would happen to them once the military left?

“Impossible. This can’t be real,” Luo Yuan mumbled to himself, his face draining of any color.

Despite his willpower, once he thought about the fall of the city, and the millions of its residents becoming mutated beast food, he felt goosebumps rising. He shuddered involuntarily.

The people had always relied on and been emboldened by the military. As long as the military was there, there was still hope, no matter how grim things looked. Even when the wave of mutated beasts had entered the city, Luo Yuan had still maintained a sliver of hope, because the military had still been fighting endlessly.

Indeed, his capabilities were spectacular – each of his 13-point attributes slowly detaching him from human physical boundaries towards evolution. However, regardless of how strong a person was, unless they broke a certain barrier, they would be no stronger than an average person under the circumstances.

Chapter 83: The Underground Base

A shadow was running across the deserted street.

The fallen building and the flames nearby formed a perfect apocalypse scene.

Luo Yuan had nowhere to go in his anger. He could only keep running. The street was deserted, forming a grey miserable picture. He crossed street after street as he headed to the grocery store in his residential area. It took him more than ten minutes, even though he'd picked up his pace. His eyes squinted when he saw the situation at the store.

There were eight heavy trucks by its entrance, and several dozens of soldiers moving bags of food outside relentlessly.

“Thank god, they haven’t left,” Luo Yuan muttered to himself. The expression on his face was gloomy.

After looking at it for a while, he walked towards the store.

He'd barely walked a hundred meters when some of the soldiers turned in his direction in alert. One of them waved his hand and hollered, “Hold up! The store has been taken over by the military! Nobody is allowed here!”

Luo Yuan did not stop.

“Last warning! If you move forward, we’ll fire!”

The soldier turned serious while the rest of them tightened their grasp on their weapons.

Luo Yuan stopped, making the soldiers think he’d given up, before he quickened his steps and sprinted in their direction. His speed was so high, all they saw was his shadow.

“F*ck, he’s evolved! Fire!” a Second Lieutenant ordered when he saw his incredible speed.

If this had been a peaceful time, the soldiers might have hesitated upon hearing the order, but these men had just returned from the battlefield. Bullets rained down on Luo Yuan as they did what they’d been told to.

The bullets swept up sand and stones as they hit the ground, but none of them hit Luo Yuan.

It was not that the soldiers had terrible aim. They were actually not bad after having been through so many battles. It was just that Luo Yuan could sense all the fired bullets. He could endure the exertion now that his Physique had gotten stronger and he did not get nosebleeds as easily as he’d used to. He was like a rootless duckweed, dodging bullets left and right as they grazed past him.

The Second Lieutenant grew worried. Watching him get near, he raised his hand and hollered, “Everyone stop firing!”

The firing ceased at once.

This was how the strong got treated. One had to be strong to earn a conversation. Otherwise, Luo Yuan would have been fired to death before he had even gotten near.

“Are you evolved?” the Second Lieutenant asked lowly.

Luo Yuan stopped and nodded. He had already sensed that he was being targeted from three different directions following the Second Lieutenant’s signal. He checked those directions without batting an eye.

Noticing Luo Yuan’s action, the Second Lieutenant was startled. “I’ve seen people like you in the first special force, but I have never met anyone as strong as you. If it’s the food you’re after, it belongs to the government. You’re delusional if you think you can walk away from here with so much as one bag! Over our dead bodies!”

“I’m not after the food!” Luo Yuan stared coldly at the Second Lieutenant for a while before he added in a raspy voice, “I just want to know where you’re taking it!”

“This is confidential military information. You have no right to know!” The Second Lieutenant said.

“Are you preparing to pull back?” Luo Yuan asked.

“That’s confidential military information!” the Second Lieutenant forced the words out as he broke out into a sweat.

Luo Yuan grew wary as he took in the ashamed expression on the soldiers’ faces. He walked forward and said agitatedly, “Where are you going? When? Tell me!”

The Second Lieutenant took a step back, still not saying a word.

“You can’t even tell me that much? Humans are made of flesh and blood. Are you all really going to watch Hedong City fall without lifting a finger? There are millions of people, millions of innocent souls! Give everyone a way out!” Luo Yuan said emotionally.

The dozens of soldiers moving the food had already come up to them by now. It was quiet all around. After a while, a soldier suddenly took off his helmet and threw it to the ground, “Sir, just tell him. We’re already committing a sin for the next dozens of generations by doing this, why care about f*cking confidentiality?”

“Shut up!” the Second Lieutenant scolded.

“Sir, we’re all people’s soldiers. We should be finding a way out for them!” another soldier expressed his thoughts.

“Sir, tell him. My parents are still in my hometown. I don’t even know how they are, but if they knew, they’d agree with me... We’re not any different just because we’re wearing a military

uniform; it'll be hard to see our parents again after leaving home...," a dark-skinned soldier sang as he spoke.

A lot of soldiers followed suit, singing in low voices, some of them with red eyes as they thought about their parents' unknown fate back at home.

"Are all of you free? Have you finished moving the food? Who said you could rest? Keep moving the food!" the Second Lieutenant hollered. He knew that he could not allow this mood to spread among the platoon. These soldiers had been under a huge amount of pressure ever since hearing the huge death tolls the previous day. If they broke down, the consequences would be unimaginable. There could even be a mutiny.

Nobody moved in the platoon. A few soldiers halted when they saw that nobody else was moving.

The air seemed to have frozen.

The Second Lieutenant maintained a straight face. After a while, he sighed and told Luo Yuan quietly, "We would not have been able to last any longer... All we could do was retreat to the underground base temporarily!"

"Where's the underground base?" Luo Yuan rushed to ask.

"In the Lanshan Area, a large site not too far from here. It could host about a million people once the construction is completed, but

time has been tight and the war broke out suddenly. Only one third of the area has been completed yet. Hopefully, you'll be able to sneak in. It's at 12 a.m. tonight!"

"Of course it's there!" Luo Yuan suddenly came to a realization. He remembered the construction site not far away from the residential area. The construction had never stopped ever since it had started, other than for the last few days. Construction vehicles had kept buzzing even when the mutated mosquitoes had been raging. It was all because they'd been building an underground base.

"If you agree to military recruitment, you can follow us back now and can bring up to two family members with you!" the Second Lieutenant suggested.

"Only two?" Luo Yuan asked.

"The space is limited. This is already a special treatment for evolved people!"

Luo Yuan remained silent for a while. In the end, he shook his head, "I need to think about it. I'll take my leave now, thank you."

"No need to thank me, I didn't tell you anything. It's best that you forget everything you've heard. Just keep it in mind," the Second Lieutenant said coldly as he turned away.

Luo Yuan nodded and walked away shakily.

“Why are you back so late?” Huang Jiahui asked as she passed Luo Yuan a bottle of water.

Looking at Huang Jiahui’s worried expression, Luo Yuan said softly, “I went outside to check on things.”

“What’s going on outside?” her hopeful face held a hint of unease.

Luo Yuan opened his mouth, but the words got stuck in his throat.

“The bombing has quieted down. Are the mutated beasts almost wiped out in the city?” Wang Shishi asked softly.

Luo Yuan looked at her young face. He remained quiet for a moment before he said slowly, “All of you are leaving with me tonight. We can’t stay here anymore. The military can’t hold the beasts out and they’re retreating into the underground base. We’ll join them!”

Everyone was stunned. After a long while, Huang Jiahui asked sadly, “What about the food here?”

“Just leave it, no one’s gonna steal it. When the situation gets better, we can still come back and get it,” Luo Yuan said,

“Brother Luo, can everyone go to the underground base?” Huang Yueying asked timidly. She had been quiet all this time.

Luo Yuan took a glance at her. The sensitive woman had already sensed that something was wrong. Even though it would be cruel, there were only two places. If he had to choose, he could only give her up.

Luo Yuan did not say it out loud. People could do unthinkable things if they lost hope. Instead, he said, “No, there’s a quota. I can bring you all along because I’m evolved.”

Huang Yueying nodded and cast her eyes down. Her body trembled slightly.

Chapter 84: Exposed

After drinking, Luo Yuan leaned against the wall and looked aimlessly at the ceiling. He did not move at all.

The future was as bleak as this dark basement. There was not a sliver of light to be seen.

As the sun set, the sky began getting darker.

They had a rather lavish dinner and then began preparing to leave for the underground base.

Luo Yuan went out to get the car, but returned empty-handed after several minutes. His face looked upset.

“Why didn’t you drive the car up to the front door?” Huang Jiahui asked while she packed her clothes.

“The 4WD was squashed by a crumbling wall and the antique car has been stolen,” Luo Yuan said. “Looks like we have to walk there.”

“That thief should be shot to death!” Huang Jiahui said with spite as she threw her clothes.

“Forget it, it’s not like we didn’t steal it too.”

“Can’t we get another car?”

Luo Yuan lit a cigarette and took a long drag. “We wouldn’t have the keys, even if we found one. The underground base is not too far from here. Let’s just walk.”

“Not like there’s anything else we can do,” she said and sighed.

She pushed the clothes in and zipped the bag, then filled the Desert Eagle with the synthesized jade-white bullets Luo Yuan had given her and slotted the pistol on her hip. She hesitated before asking, “Should we pack some food?”

“Let’s not. We don’t have a car anymore, it’ll be too heavy,” Luo Yuan said, shaking his head. After thinking about it, he added, “Bring some water and condensed biscuits, just in case.”

He turned and saw Wang Shishi happily hugging a bear the size of a person. “Put that thing down! Get a backpack from the second floor and fill it with food stamps and gold bars from the bedroom and the safe in the basement!”

“Brother Luo, I... I can carry this!” Wang Shishi said with a pout. This Disney bear had been in her bedroom and was much better than the one she’d had at home. She had liked it ever since she had laid eyes on it.

Luo Yuan frowned, ready to lash out at her.

Huang Jiahui quickly advised, “Shishi, it’s not safe to bring this along. Put it down, you’ll get another one in the future.”

Wang Shishi jutted her lips before slamming the bear down with red eyes and stomping her way up the stairs.

Luo Yuan sighed. He knew that Wang Shishi had always liked soft toys. Before moving to the mansion, a dirty bear had always been sitting on her bed. She could only sleep hugging one of those at night.

Sometimes, when Luo Yuan came back from practicing his machete in the early mornings, he would find Wang Shishi crying in fits in her sleep.

This sudden apocalypse had brought a far more serious psychological trauma to Wang Shishi than it seemed. After all, she was still a teenage girl who had yet to grow up. There was no way she could bear all the trauma brought by the world, no matter how tough she was.

The apocalypse did not allow room for romanticism, nor toleration for sympathy. There was only elimination due to failure to adjust. Maybe life now would seem like heaven years down the road.

Luo Yuan stopped thinking and checked the weather outside. It was a full moon tonight, and it was bright and clear even without a flashlight. As for the bombings in the distance, they too had become less frequent as the night fell.

He checked the Rado watch he had found inside this house. It was 9 p.m. on Lunar New Year's eve, apparently.

This time last year, he was watching the Spring Festival Gala in his rented room, thinking about where to eat the next day, but this year, he was worrying about surviving. Nobody could imagine the crazy changes the world could bring.

Luo Yuan headed to the living room. Wang Shishi had already returned with a backpack on her back. Looking at her throwing a tantrum, Luo Yuan tapped her shoulder and passed her the synthesized shuttle. "This is your companion. Your best and most loyal companion!"

Wang Shishi took the shuttle and nodded, seeming to understand the notion behind it.

Noticing that they were done packing, Luo Yuan checked the time and said, "The underground base opens at 12 a.m. but we should head out now, just in case something happens along the way. Jiahui, you carry the box with the clothes. Huang Yueying, you carry the box with the food. I'll be on the lookout. Let's go!"

Huang Yueying shuddered, her face a little pasty.

Since Luo Yuan had decided to take them to the underground base, she had thought that the way he looked at her had become a little strange. It had made her anxious the whole afternoon and that anxiety had finally peaked now that Luo Yuan had asked her

to carry the box of food.

Food, clothes, and money held a different value to everyone during this apocalyptic era. To those with power, money came first as they didn't have to worry about food or warmth; normal people placed food first, because they needed it in order to survive.

Luo Yuan was not powerful nor influential, but he was a strong, evolved person. He could easily obtain food or mutated beast meat. Despite the military control at the underground base, he would still be important as an evolved person and would not have to worry about food. He would be okay even if that food were to be gone.

So, was this arrangement intentional? Regardless, it only proved her insignificance to Luo Yuan. It was a pity that she had been there for such a short period of time. Despite the fact that she had performed well, it still had not changed the bad impression she had made on Luo Yuan.

Now that they were leaving, she had to make a decision. She built up the courage and said through gritted teeth, "Brother Luo, can you come to my room? I have something to discuss with you."

"What is it? Can't you say it here?" Luo Yuan asked, curious.

Both Huang Jiahui and Wang Shishi looked over at her suspiciously. Their gazes made her break out in cold sweat.

“It’s about the underground base. I have some intel.” Her hands clutched the hem of her clothes, the veins popping out on the back of her hands.

Luo Yuan got serious. He had only recently moved to Hedong City and had no connections, thus he didn’t know much. Huang Yueying, on the other hand, was local and had been staying in the area for a long time. He was not suspecting a thing as he told the other two girls to wait.

Huang Yueying’s heart thumped wildly as she opened the door to her bedroom, closing it immediately after Luo Yuan had stepped in.

Just as Luo Yuan was about to ask her what she wanted to tell him, Huang Yueying squatted down and reached out to pull down the zipper of his pants. She was, after all, a demure married woman. Her seduction tactic was direct and lacked any coyness.

“What are you doing?” Luo Yuan asked in a hushed voice as he took a step back.

Huang Yueying remembered how Luo Yuan had killed people without batting an eye. Her mind went blank as she trembled, “I... I...”

“Is there anything else that you want? If not, I’m leaving,” Luo Yuan said emotionlessly.

Huang Yueying had not expected things to go this way. Her face turned pale as she clung onto him. “No, don’t go.”

Luo Yuan looked at Huang Yueying, who was both begging and fawning. She looked like a frightened pigeon ready to collapse any time now. He sighed inwardly, but still made himself say, “This did not happen. We can’t stay here any longer, let’s go.”

Huang Yueying nodded uneasily and forced a smile, Her smile troubled Luo Yuan.

The two of them came out of the room. Wang Shishi’s eyes travelled back and forth between them, but of course, her lack of experience did not allow her to read anything. They both looked calm and collected. Huang Jiahui though, appeared thoughtful.

Luo Yuan and the girls walked out of the residential area cautiously. The bombings had stopped, leaving the growls of the mutated beasts to fill the air.

Large shadows flew across their heads from time to time, the wind they produced making rubbish and dust dance around. The ruined buildings on both sides of the road cast crooked shadows under the bright moonlight. Some people were rushing down the street in pairs or threes while the four of them lugged their belongings with hastened steps. The street was eerily quiet. No one was speaking.

Cars drove by, some of them stopping to pick up people, but most of them just zooming away.

Half an hour later, the crowd seemed to grow as they got closer to the construction site. The six-lane street was full of people.

Those who had driven there could no longer move forward with their cars and got off to retrieve their luggage from the back of their cars while they cursed, unable to wait any longer.

Luo Yuan frowned as he took in the scene. They still had more than two hours to go. It was only 10 p.m. If the Second Lieutenant had not lied, then it was not even close to the time the underground base was to open.

“What’s up?” Huang Jiahui asked anxiously as she took in Luo Yuan’s worried expression.

Luo Yuan said quietly, “It’s still far from the given time, yet there’s already so many people waiting. This is very strange.”

“You never told us, how many people can the underground base host?” Huang Jiahui asked worriedly.

Luo Yuan hesitated before he said in her ear, “Three hundred thousand!”

Huang Jiahui’s hand flew to her mouth, her face losing its color. Three hundred thousand slots? What would this mean for the 4 – 5 million people in the city? She dared not imagine. Sympathy was a luxury in this apocalyptic era. She quickly pondered the problem,

“This should be confidential, otherwise the consequences would be unthinkable. Do you think the secret’s been exposed?”

“I hope I’m wrong!” Luo Yuan shook his head.

Nothing in this world was completely confidential, let alone a life-and-death matter.

Conscience and morality had always been ingrained in everyone living in a structured society. Even the worst of criminals were restrained by those shackles. Humans were social animals. Everyone had someone they could not leave behind; choosing was a torturous decision for people because in this case, it also meant discarding somebody else.

When maintaining secrecy was so hard, breaching confidentiality was only logical.

Friends had other friends, and relatives had more relatives; secrets no longer remained secrets under such circumstances.

Chapter 85: Stars

The incandescent lamp illuminated the enclosed meeting room bright as a day. Under its strikingly bright light, an emergency meeting was being held.

A dozen of the most influential people in Hedong City watched the huge screen in front of them with serious faces. The screen showed the entrance of the base, where several hundreds of soldiers formed a wall holding riot shields and barely keeping the order of the chaos currently ensuing there.

The Quartz clock on the wall ticked. As the seconds passed, the atmosphere in the meeting room got tense.

Some people were already sweating.

“How many people are already in the underground base?” a middle-aged man chairing the meeting finally asked in a low voice after several minutes.

“Thirty five thousand soldiers, plus various technicians, scientific researchers, base investors and relatives of these people. The approximate total is 180,000 people. There’s another 20,000 plus soldiers who are rushing over from the outskirts of the city after completing their duties. Based on the base’s capacity, we can still take in about 100,000 people,” a skinny middle-aged man said softly, lifting his head after scribbling something inside his notebook.

“Can’t we make more space?”

“It’s not that easy. According to our calculations, 300,000 is already our maximum capacity. Maybe if we clear out some unnecessary inventory warehouses, we might be able to fit another 150,000.”

“We’re out of time. According to the intel from the 8th battalion, mutated beasts from the outskirts are already pouring into Hedong City. They’ll be here soon enough. Our explosives are not enough to defend the base for more than a few hours. Unless we use nuclears and wipe out everything in the woods!” a military man with Lieutenant General pinned to his shoulder said grimly.

The discussion got heated after his words.

The chairman looked alarmed as he unconsciously tapped the table with his index finger.

If nuclear weapons were detonated, not only could reformation after the war speed up significantly, but they would also be able to clear any additional issues that might crop up and ensure the survival of Hedong City’s large population. They could even return to the land without having to move into the underground base first.

Global nuclear weapons restrictions were barely enforced at times like these, and detonation of nuclear weapons was getting more and more common. According to the satellite indication, countries around the world had detonated near to a hundred

atomic bombs within just half a year's time. Among them were the USA with 12 bombs, Russia with 21 bombs, France with 6 bombs, the UK with 8 bombs, India with 15 bombs, Pakistan with 6 bombs, Israel with 3 bombs, Japan with 2 bombs, Germany with 1 bomb, and China with 11 bombs.

Although an atomic bomb detonation was no longer a controversy, it still stressed him to have to detonate one in his own city.

This was not just any missile after all, nor was it a smaller scale atomic bomb like the one detonated in Hiroshima. It was a weapon of massive destruction, and any slight deviation of the guided missile would cost several millions of innocent lives. Even this high-defense underground base would be destroyed.

The tense atmosphere in the meeting room thickened. Some people were already breaking out in cold sweat.

“Then let's vote!”

“What are you doing?” Wang Shishi exclaimed, glaring at a perverted-looking man behind her.

“Little girl, I only came into slight contact with you. Look at how crowded it is here, I can't help it. You can touch me back if you want,” the man teased, showing his yellow teeth.

Wang Shishi was rendered speechless by the man's shameless

talk.

“What’s wrong?” Luo Yuan squeezed over and asked as he heard the commotion.

“He... he touched my butt!” Wang Shishi huffed as she pointed at the man. Recognizing her savior, she clung tightly onto Luo Yuan’s arm.

Luo Yuan looked at the perverse man, who was still smiling and smirking, and instantly knew he was a twisted scoundrel. He wanted to teach the bastard a lesson, but he looked at the timid expression on Wang Shishi’s face and changed his mind, “You should stand up for yourself. If you can’t, then you might as well pretend nothing happened.”

Huang Jiahui had not noticed what had just happened, so she turned her head to ask, “What’s going on?”

“Shishi got bullied. Don’t get involved, though. Let her solve it herself,” Luo Yuan stopped her.

“Oh, now you want to teach me a lesson? Aren’t you being too overbearing? It’s so crowded here! Who hasn’t gotten squeezed or had their feet stepped on? Be reasonable, you guys!” the man smiled smugly as he hollered. He had seen that there were a lot of people around.

Those who were watching did not know what had actually

happened and clapped along merrily. “Yeah, it’s too crowded here! Some touching is unavoidable, just endure it. I also had my butt touched a few times!”

“You cow, only the blind would want to touch you. Or was it your gay friend, now?”

“F*ck off!”

These people didn’t have a bad intention, they were just watching for the sake of fun.

Seeing that the crowd was on his side, the man got even cockier. His eyes never left Wang Shishi’s chest, which angered the girl to no end.

Luo Yuan shook his head, “Forget it, he’s right. You can’t blame anyone about this happening here. Let’s go!”

The spectators suddenly looked at him in disdain. It was one thing to tell someone up to stand up for themselves, but it was another to be cowardly. The fight might not have been serious, but cowering was not a manly thing to do.

“Brother Luo, I understand what you mean. I’m not going to be bullied by some motherf*cker,” Wang Shishi said loudly.

“Motherf*cker?” Luo Yuan was shocked.

Before he could react, Wang Shishi had already charged over with a loud cry and stomped on the man. Despite the fact that a woman's physique was naturally weaker than a man's, Wang Shishi was much stronger than the average man. Her strength had reached 11 points after consuming mutated meat for so long. Thanks to that unexpected element, the scrawny man was kicked down in an instant.

"You b*tch, you dared touch my butt!" Wang Shishi continued scolding him as she kicked him.

"Try touching me again!" A kick landed brutally on his crotch, and the man curled up in pain as he cried out.

Wang Shishi squatted down and grabbed the man's hair, loud slaps resounding in the air as she said loudly, "Still want to touch me? Feels great to touch me, doesn't it? Touch me, motherf*cker! Come on, touch me..."

Luo Yuan was dumbfounded. He felt like he was meeting Wang Shishi for the first time. Was this even the same person?

In fact, Wang Shishi had never been a timid girl. Her first day in kindergarten, she had scratched a boy's face for snatching her toys; she was the third sister among what their junior high used to call the 'eight sisters', the one who blocked people in the toilets, scaring both girls and boys away. It was when Luo Yuan had taken her under his wing that she'd started to put up the girly act, afraid that she would make a bad impression on him. She had kept faking

it till they all had believed it.

In the end, the man was begging in tears, snot running down his face.

Huang Jiahui finally pulled her up, “Shishi, stop. He’s learned his lesson.”

“Motherf...” Wang Shishi forced the rest of the word down her throat as she finally came back to her senses. Stealing a glance at Luo Yuan, she asked Huang Jiahui, “Sister Huang, I... did I go overboard?”

“This kind of pervert needs to be taught a lesson he can remember. See if he dares do it again!” Huang Jiahui then added, “But I’d rather if you didn’t cuss!”

“I couldn’t help it,” Wang Shishi laughed dryly as she stole glances at Luo Yuan, secretly relieved that he did not look upset.

The man seemed to have learned his lesson as he got up and disappeared in the crowd without saying a word. The crowd realized there was nothing worth watching anymore and dispersed.

The four of them continued squeezing to the front, more people crowding as they got closer to the construction site.

Looking at the sea of people, Luo Yuan got worried. If some sort

of riot were to happen, it would be sure to cause lots of deaths. He subconsciously looked at the sky. Large birds were circling around under the moonlight.

As Luo Yuan turned his eyes away, he suddenly realized that the birds were anxious. Their flight pattern was irregular and they emitted strange noises. The same strange growls came from the mutated beasts in the distance.

These growls sounded anxious and irritated, as if the birds were sensing a grave danger.

Unconsciously, he turned his eyes towards the north. A star was producing a weak light in the faraway sky. He quickly realized that this was not just any star. The light got brighter as his left eyelid twitched, goosebumps rising on his skin. His heart thumped hard.

He stared at the star that kept getting brighter and brighter. His body was frozen like a statue.

Luo Yuan came back to his senses after a while, and quickly pulled Wang Shishi and Huang Jiahui to him, saying in a low voice, "Come with me at once!"

Chapter 86: Sun

Huang Yuying had no idea of what was going on but she felt chills down her spine when she saw the uneasiness on Luo Yuan's face. She hurriedly followed them without a second thought.

Luo Yuan forced his way outwards pulling the two girls along. He felt increasingly oppressed, and the anxieties in his heart made him want to scream and shout. He pushed forcefully through the crowd and received verbal abuse from others there though he seemed not to hear any of it.

He quickly crossed to the side of the street and observed his surroundings. In a second, he sprinted towards the front of a shopping mall. Big buildings like this would normally be built with an underground parking lot, but before he could reach it his body began to tremble.

Not only was he shaking, the whole world seemed to be shaking as well!

The noise on the street quickly died away as the crowd became silent. Everybody stood still as they tried to look in the distance. The expressions on their faces quickly changed and their jaws dropped from the absolute horror!!!

Luo Yuan and his companions could not help but stop and cast their gaze towards the distance as well. An enormous sun with a blinding glow gradually rose in the distance, quickly diminishing the darkness.

“Atom...Bomb!!!” Luo Yuan screamed even though he initially struggled to get the words out through his parched lips.

It was difficult to describe the scene. It was so magnificent and dazzling, yet Luo Yuan only felt more distressed and worried.

The light quickly diminished as the “sun” rose thousands of meters high. An unexpected yet familiar mushroom shaped cloud formed in the sky, as fissile products which amassed from the detonation poured down heavily. Then suddenly within seconds, Boom! A deafening sound struck like a violent thunder.

The whole city continued to shake, as the earth was trembling and engulfing the damaged buildings to the ground.

Strong winds swept throughout the city, filling their vision with only dirt and dust. Shortly after, the people came to their senses on what had just taken place. Screams filled the air and they began to run for their lives in every direction. The crowd pushed and pulled, hastily trying to escape by stepping over each other causing those who had fallen to perish.

A picture of pure chaos could be painted from the screams for help alone and the fear of despair that filled the city.

Luckily, Luo Yuan and his companions hid by the side of the streets, safe from the riot that had just broke out.

Just as Luo Yuan felt fortunate that the atomic detonation did not bring too much damage other than the panic from the crowd (as it occurred several dozen kilometres away), he saw another star falling...followed by a third.

Three mushroom clouds dominated the dark sky like three giant fists.

Wang Shishi hid behind Luo Yuan shaking in fear, the high spirits she had from before had vanished. Huang Jiahui was no better; she was also trembling in fear as she held on to Luo Yuan's hands tightly. As for Huang Yuying, she would have certainly collapsed to the floor if not for her body leaning against the wall.

"The radiation has already reached us. Quickly, get inside." Huang Jiahui suddenly cried out.

Luo Yuan mumbled, "Radiation? What about radiation? Even if genetic deterioration occurs, it's in the future!"

Huang Jiahui was stunned for a second but later began to relax. It was true, what about radiation. People living in this apocalyptic era could not afford to be this fragile. It was fortunate enough to not have died immediately from the atomic detonation. As for the future, they would just have to deal with it what lies ahead. She then asked, "So are we still headed to the basement?"

"Yes, since we're already here, we should just go and check it out!" Luo Yuan sighed as he spoke.

The sound of diesel engines could be heard from afar, at this instant most the crowd had already retreated to the sides of the street. Armored vehicles and transport trucks sped pass one after another. None of these vehicles were intact, in fact one of the tanks even had a footprint several dozen centimetres deep.

An army of soldiers were seen sitting on the transport truck. They were motionless, with a grim expression. It was difficult to imagine what they had just been through.

The streets had been covered with bodies from the stampede yet these vehicles showed no signs of stopping. Perhaps these soldiers could no longer feel remorse towards the bodies that lay before them anymore. These men had probably seen hundreds or even a thousand times more corpses and had become numb.

The vehicles drove over the bodies, further crushing them into splatters of crimson red.

Huang Jiahui and the other two ladies turned away and puked from the sight before them. Luo Yuan was not looking any better but he realized that the soldiers looked indifferent, unaffected even.

He could notice that they were no longer the troops during the peaceful period. Compared to the first time he had saw them in Donghu City, they had become much more terrifying. Their willpower would have probably surpassed those who had experienced WWII, as their enemy was far more frightening and cruel than any human being.

These soldiers were cold like machines, indifferent towards life and death. Perhaps their frightened expressions would only surface the moment death came upon them.

The row of vehicles had come and passed after ten minutes.

The crowd in front suddenly began to scramble.

“The doors are opened!”

“The doors are finally opened! So many soldiers have come out!”

Luo Yuan stood on tiptoe but still could not see what was happening near the gate as it was swarmed with people in front.

The crowd was at a standstill as if some problems were occurring ahead of them. Suddenly, a cheer could be heard in front after two hours had passed and the crowd began moving slowly.

Luo Yuan let out a sigh of relief, squeezing through the crowd while pulling along the other two girls. It involved a lot of effort as the girls were also holding onto their luggage. If it were not for both the woman's considerable strength, they probably could not even move an inch forward. Just a few minutes later, they were already sweating profusely.

Luo Yuan turned and realized that they had lost Huang Yuying,

who was possibly squeezed away by the crowd.

He apologised in his heart and continued pushing forward. Huang Jiahui and Wang Shishi made no sound even as Luo Yuan had gripped their arms with force as they both understood that one misstep could mean death.

The city was filled with radiation. In addition to the mutated beasts attacks, staying here would certainly lead to their deaths.

Cries from the mutated beasts could be heard outside as screams began to burst from the people at the back. Luo Yuan felt himself being pushed towards the front forcefully.

“Ah!!!” Wang Shishi screamed as she was shoved to the ground. The horror had unleashed all of her telekinetic powers but it was small in comparison to the massive crowd.

Suddenly, a blue ray could be seen! Blood spurted as a person’s leg was severed. He fell to the ground and countless of feet then stepped on him.

Luo Yuan immediately pulled Wang Shishi up and took her luggage as he reminded her, “Be careful, don’t fall again.”

“Mm, mm!” Wang Shishi was terrified, nodding and grabbing onto Luo Yuan.

“You didn’t get stepped on, did you?” Huang Jiahui looked at

Wang Shishi and asked.

“No, Brother Luo pulled me up just in time,” Wang Shishi said as she shook her head.

As they spoke, the beast’s growls grew nearer and the horrified screams from the crowd grew louder. Suddenly, something splashed onto the back of Luo Yuan’s neck prompting him to check it with his hand. He quickly glanced at his palm and it was filled with blood.

Some hundreds of meters away, a 3-story tall dinosaur-like mutated beast was running among the sea of people. Even though it seemed that it had no intention of killing, each step it took squashed the tightly knitted sea of people into mud pies.

Perhaps it was too excited from seeing so much food. It looked more like it was playing than hunting a prey.

A few minutes had passed and it got bored of playing and stopped to chomp down a human.

A woman who was right next to the unfortunate victim was petrified, frozen on the spot as the people around her ran for their lives.

With the appearance of this beast, more beasts approached within minutes.

Screams and cries could be heard all around, the strong copper stench of blood made the place seem like a slaughterhouse!

Chapter 87: Suicide

“Brother Luo, its coming!” Wang Shishi screamed, as her face turned pale.

“Hold on tightly to my hand!” Luo Yuan said intently, he too was anxious as he watched the approaching beast, while pushing his way towards the front of the crowd. He could not do anything regardless of his strong powers in such a crowded place.

Desperation had surrounded the people and outcries rang loud in their ears.

The crowd stood motionless for a moment as if possessed by another higher energy before the struggle of pushes came from the front and the back. Some people who were trapped in the middle puked blood from the sheer force on them. Hopeless curses came faintly from the front.

The worst had happened.

“They’ve opened fire, how can they open fire?” Huang Jiahui’s pale face was a mixture of fright and disbelief.

“What about us?” Wang Shishi asked in a worried voice.

Luo Yuan was completely upset, spitting out the words, “We can’t go there anymore, let’s go back. Leave your luggage, we need to go towards the buildings from the side.”

“No! All our money is here, what would we do if we lost it all?” Huang Jiahui said unwillingly.

“All our clothes are here as well!” Wang Shishi too followed.

“We can find clothes again, and with regards to money, you probably can’t find a place to spend it anymore in the future,” Luo Yuan said.

Huang Jiahui was traumatized as her hands let go of the luggage.

Three of them forced their way to the side but after a few steps, the beast was already approaching them. Its gigantic body was rolling down the hill, brushing people aside.

Without waiting for Luo Yuan’s order, Huang Jiahui had already retrieved her gun and pulled the trigger.

“Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!”

A few white bullets flew out from the gun’s muzzle. This was probably a light blue level beast as it could not withstand the attacks of the synthesized bullets. The bullets went through its body swiftly, leaving only bullet holes behind.

One of the bullets went right into its eyes, bringing it to its death.

Due to its momentum, it still moved a few steps before finally collapsing onto the ground.

Shock flashed through Huang Jiahui's face as she subconsciously counted the number of bullets left in her pocket.

“Quick!” Luo Yuan pulled a dazed Huang Jiahui along.

A few minutes later, Luo Yuan squeezed them into a nearby building. It used to be a supermarket as racks were placed neatly inside but they were completely empty. The supermarket was shut down a long time ago by the looks of it.

People poured inside, with more and more starting to come through the door.

Even if it was not safe here, it was still better than being outside.

Luo Yuan moved to the inner most corners and sat Wang Shishi down. He felt his pocket and took out a squashed packet of cigarettes. He lit one up.

“Can I have one?” A fair-skinned middle-aged man beside them asked as he saw Luo Yuan smoking.

Luo Yuan nodded and tossed over a cigarette.

“Sorry, I don't have a lighter too,” he said awkwardly.

Luo Yuan tossed the lighter over as well.

The middle-aged man lighted his cigarette with his trembling hands, taking in a deep breath, followed by violent coughs-an obvious sign that he is not a smoker. Yet he kept on smoking like an addict who had been long deprived and started sobbing.

He cried for a while before wiping his tears off his face and said grimly, "Thanks for your cigarette!"

"You're welcome," Luo Yuan said gently.

"I'm embarrassed but I don't care anymore. My son just died from the stampede just now. I saw his ribs shattered as it was stepped on. Blood poured out from his mouth as he was shouting "Dad, it hurts, save me!" But I could only watch helplessly. I couldn't have done anything by then.

He sobbed again as his lips quivered, "I...I couldn't even bring his body along as people were already pushing me to the side...He's only six... He's a very good boy who didn't throw any fits even when he was starving," The man said brokenly, pausing continuously in between his words.

Luo Yuan sighed but remained quiet.

"I heard from some people that a large dugout was built here so I rushed over. Who knew that in the process of looking for a safer

place...it had killed him and he died...It's good too, since he no longer needs to suffer through this pain anymore. And I'll be there with him soon so he won't be lonely down there!" He laughed humorlessly, "I should go now, otherwise my child won't be able to find me later."

Luo Yuan turned, shocked, "You?"

"Thank you for listening to me. Don't persuade me. I'm not crazy, this world has gone crazy. I'm helpless, I can't survive. Death will free me. Rather than starving to death or becoming the food for the mutated beasts, I can die an easy death now." He shook his head, with hopelessness all over his face.

As he spoke, he took a dagger out and stabbed it into his heart. He frowned, as his face was filled with pain as he gritted his teeth and pulled the dagger out. Blood gushed out from his wound.

Wang Shishi covered her mouth in horror.

Luo Yuan sighed in remorse. He could have stopped him from committing suicide but he did not because just like the man had said, death would be freeing him under such circumstances.

"I feel like my body is floating... It's so light. It's great. Taotao, wait for me." His eyes closed as he finished talking, and his body fell against the wall softly with a smile on his face.

"Hopefully we won't end up like this one day!" Huang Jiahui said

hoarsely, the man's suicide shocked her to her core.

Luo Yuan pulled Huang Jiahui into his embrace, hugging her tightly and spoke softly in her ear, "Such a day won't come."

The walls of the supermarket began to quake and crumble; a mutated beast was emerging from the gravels and the people began to move back out of fear.

Luo Yuan stood up, "Let's go, we should leave and find another place."

He stabbed his machete into the wall and carved a circle. He then kicked it apart, forming a hole in the wall around a meter wide. He lowered his body and squeezed through it. Wang Shishi and Huang Jiahui followed him closely from behind.

A few people around them trailed behind to observe the scene.

The back of the supermarket had a wide road that was not crowded. A black python with a girth about the size of a bucket's circumference was meandering forward several dozen meters in front, scaring everyone on the street.

Even though the swarm of people made it more difficult to escape, they provided a good distraction for the mutated beasts. As the python swallowed one of the passersby, Luo Yuan and his girls crossed the street swiftly and managed to move into the office tower. He did not hesitate and quickly made another hole with his

machete in order to enter the tower.

Perhaps it was the confidence in how they moved which steered people to continuously tag along the way. Unfortunately, some were left behind as they could not keep up. Half an hour later, about ten people were left tailing Luo Yuan. Maybe the crowd gathering at the underground base had attracted the mutated beast's attention and slowly declined in number as the group of people following Luo Yuan got further away from the underground base.

He stopped for a breather as they ran into a hotel basement parking seeing that the coast was clear.

"Friend, where are you guys going?" A tall and skinny man had asked after catching his breath.

Luo Yuan realized that he had nowhere to go other than returning to the mansion but the passage towards the mansion required him to pass the underground base which was currently infested with mutated beasts. Now would certainly not be the right time to return, so he said, "Wherever that is safe, any good suggestions?"

The man let his disappointment show, "I am not from here and have not stayed here long either. I don't know where would be safer. Hedong City has a dugout though. I guess we will be safe as long as we manage to find the dugout nearby."

"I know where it is!" A woman whose face was bloodied suddenly

spoke.

Chapter 88: Coercion

“93 Jiangbei Road, my old company was near there!” The woman continued.

“I think it is there too. It used to be open for quite a while last time, I recall visiting it once,” A man spoke.

“It’s not far from here. Walk along the front road towards the east until you reach the northern intersection, that’s where Jiangbei Road is. It’s only a few kilometers away, let’s leave now!” A plump man said with conviction.

Yet no one bothered, everyone was looking at Luo Yuan. The man notably felt awkward from being ignored.

Perhaps that man may have been a manager or a boss before but during times like this, nobody cared how rich and influential he used to be.

While Luo Yuan had not shown any extraordinary powers along the way, he had been exceptionally calm throughout the half an hour run, pulling the two girls along with him without showing any panic even when the mutated beasts lurked nearby.

He could feel everyone staring at him. Luo Yuan, after keeping silent for some time, spoke. “Since the dugout is nearby, we should go there. We should leave after a ten minute break!”

Everyone sat down quietly. The plump man who had spoken out earlier sat down next to Wang Shishi, with a happy smile, “I’m Huo Dong, how do I address you, brother?”

Wang Shishi moved herself closer to Luo Yuan with despise towards that man.

Luo Yuan tapped her hand lightly, turned to him and said. “Call me Luo Yuan!”

Huo Dong then continued, “What a fine young man you are, Brother Luo! If it were the ancient times you would have definitely been a valiant warrior. You will definitely become someone great some day!” He then looked at Wang Shishi and praised, “Even your younger sister is such a beauty, and her future husband would be a lucky man!”

Wang Shishi’s face flushed, stealing a peek at Luo Yuan as she responded with a smile, “I’m not his younger sister.”

It would be an endless conversation once you reply to these kinds of people; words of flattery and sweet-talk were second nature to them. Huo Dong indeed continued with his conversation, “Excuse my poor eyesight. Then you must be his missus. Only Brother Luo could match such a missus’ beauty. This beauty must also be your missus too. Brother Luo, you are so lucky!”

Luo Yuan looked at him with a smile until the man was left laughing.

“Sigh, I can’t be as calm and collected as you Brother Luo. Laugh at me all you want but I’ll tremble uncontrollably if I don’t divert my attention by talking.” Huo Dong lifted his head and sniffled before saying hopelessly, “I’m afraid that I won’t live to see the sun tomorrow, even if I were to survive tonight. I might die in the next second. Even if we managed to reach the dugout, it’s not going to be safe for long now that the military is gone and Hedong City is infested with mutated beasts. Besides having no food, we might not even find clean water. We will only end up starving to death if we can’t find weapons to kill the mutated beasts.”

His raspy voice echoed in the basement parking, oppressing the atmosphere as some people began to sob quietly.

“The military was retreating in a hurry, there must be some weapons left behind in the battlefield!” Someone suggested.

“Sure, there might be plenty of weapons there but who would dare to go near such a dangerous place? Even if we did manage to get our hands on them, how many people would we have sacrificed?” Huo Dong retorted.

“Why ignore what is nearby? The military factory is in the industrial area. There should be loads of firearms and even cannons there. The People’s Armed Forces are also located nearby. It’s full of outdated weapons which were not up to military standard. There must be tons of those left there now.”

The team departed that night.

The street was now empty, its surface stained with blood. A slender leg probably from a young woman could be seen lying on the road, twitching from time to time though its owner was nowhere to be found.

The pungent copper stench of blood in the air irritated everyone's nose; some of them had to stop to vomit.

Luo Yuan's face had turned slightly pale; he was feeling nauseous despite being used to scenes like this.

A few minutes later, Luo Yuan halted. Something large was lying by the roadside several hundred meters in front of him. From its figure, it was a centipede of about 5 – 6 meters long with a yellowish gold crust. Its legs were glittering under the moonlight, lining on the sides of its body. It rested quietly with a bulging stomach; something seemed to still be squirming underneath it.

This was a bloated mutated beast. Other than the humans that it could find in the city, there was nothing else it could feast on.

Thinking of what could have been inside that bloated body; Luo Yuan held a tight grip on his machete and increased his speed.

“Be careful! There is a beast in front of us, run!” Luo Yuan could see much better than normal people. Plus, it was night time, so the group could only see the large creature resting ahead after moving another 40 – 50 meters forward.

All hell broke loose as everyone began to scramble for their lives. Death awaited those who would end up face to face with a mutated beast without any weapons. Only Luo Yuan and a few others stayed put.

Luo Yuan was not surprised. Other than depending on his luck and ability to run faster than everyone else, normal people had nothing they could use to face the beasts.

The centipede raised its snake like head as it sensed movements nearby. Colorful spots marked its red head as they sparkled in the dark. The shimmery colors had only meant that this creature was incredibly venomous.

It glanced around, ready to act, but continued to lie down again when it could not sense any danger. It did not even catch a glimpse of Luo Yuan who was nearby.

Luo Yuan, who had intended to kill it while it was bloated, hesitantly paused.

It would be dangerous and stupid to determine a mutated beast's strength by its level. This beast that was exuding a light blue level aura but clearly could not fit into the usual description of a light blue level beast!

“Bro...Brother Luo, should we find another way around?” Wang Shishi stuttered as she took in the sight of such a large beast.

Luo Yuan's eyes shined as he heard Wang Shishi's voice. Venom was a threat to him but not to Wang Shishi who could multitask and had telekinesis. This beast was a great fit to train her. He thought about it and told Wang Shishi, "This beast is yours."

Wang Shishi's eyes widened as she pointed to herself, "Me?"

"This is only a second level mutated beast. You are evolved and even have telekinesis. Don't tell me you can't even handle this?" Luo Yuan tried to provoke her.

"B...But, I..." Wang Shishi was flattered by the compliment but was still discouraged by the sheer size of the beast in front of them.

"No buts... this is actually much simpler than you think. You only need to shoot the shuttle into its head and twirl it around inside. I'll be on the lookout from the side. I won't let you be harmed." Luo Yuan cut in coldly as he saw that Wang Shishi was still uncertain.

"I'm scared, I can't do this, I...I'll be eaten." She replied.

"Luo Yuan, don't force her. Shishi is still young." Huang Jiahui said, as she felt pity towards the terrified Wang Shishi.

"Shut up! The beast won't decide not to eat her just because she is still young. I don't plan to take care of a burden. If you can't even do this, don't follow me anymore," Luo Yuan said coldly. This is a cruel world lurking with danger. Any strong powers would be

useless with a weak mind; survival would be impossible in such a hellish world where danger lurked. He could only force change unto Wang Shishi since she had refused to change!

Wang Shishi shuddered, her heart felt as if it was broken into pieces. She looked at Luo Yuan in disbelief, unable to accept the fact that he had just said such words.

Huang Jiahui looked at Luo Yuan anxiously but he kept a straight face without even looking back at her. After being together for so long, she knew how he was, usually gentle and friendly but he would never budge after he had made his decision.

Since Huang Jiahui could not persuade Luo Yuan, she could only help comfort Wang Shishi, “Shishi, don’t be afraid. Your Brother Luo only wants to build up your courage, he won’t harm you.”

Wang Shishi lowered her head in dismay, thinking about how she had tried to be brave and shielded a person from poisonous mist just yesterday... yet now was treated this way. The more she thought about it, the more wronged she felt, tears then followed and poured heavily out of her eyes.

She lifted her head and said in tears, “Fine, I’ll go. Nobody cares if I die anyway. I’ll just go and get myself killed.”

She said defiantly while biting her lips as she moved forward step by step. Her eyes kept stealing glances at Luo Yuan.

She was utterly disappointed to see Luo Yuan unmoved, tears were still rolling down her cheeks. After a while, she wiped them away and took a white-jade colored two-ended shuttle out of her pocket.

Luo Yuan's gaze followed her closely, wanting to call her back several times now but he held it in. This was a necessary first step for her survival in this wretched world. Maybe he could still protect her now but not forever.

Because even he himself felt bleak thinking about the future, like a small boat flowing along the currents of the ocean, always worrying if it would capsize from a sudden wave. The helplessness was always with him; struggle was adamant if one wanted to survive.

“If you can't even protect yourself, who else would protect you? Shishi, you must always depend on yourself instead of someone else!” he said.

Chapter 89: Rejection

Wang Shishi's body trembled as she approached the mutated centipede. Her flying shuttle hovered over her head ready to attack. Her face noticeably went paler and she was grinding her teeth out of anxiety.

The next second, she used her telekinesis to catapult the shuttle towards the centipede.

The mutated beast sensed an impending danger and wanted to evade it but was too slow. The shuttle pierced through its head in the blink of an eye! It penetrated through its seemingly hard crust easily.

The centipede's body shuddered as it began to struggle but it was useless as the injury to its head was lethal. Even so, this gigantic creature's unconscious attacks before its death were still formidable.

Its huge body rolled around on the street while it was struggling, causing the ground to tremor. Pink venom was released from its mouth which had a faint sweet smell accompanying it.

Wang Shishi was completely freaked out by what had happened! She had been standing at the same spot dumbfounded and forgot to continue attacking. She had even forgotten to retract her flying shuttle.

“Shishi, run!” Luo Yuan shouted.

Only then did Wang Shishi come back to her senses and run back towards them. She hugged Luo Yuan and wepted in his embrace. She was clearly petrified and had just realized the intimidation posed by mutated beasts' when she was right in front of the centipede. Its gigantic size and eerie colors had scared her.

"Alright, alright, stop crying. The beast is dead," Luo Yuan patted her back gently and comforted her.

Wang Shishi raised her face full of tears and asked, "Dead? Did I kill it?"

"Turn and look for yourself," Luo Yuan said smiling.

Wang Shishi turned around and was surprised to see that the beast was already dead on the ground. She was in disbelief! "I...I killed it!"

"Don't forget that you're evolved, Shishi. You're different from normal people now. Killing a second level mutated beasts should be an easy feat for you," Luo Yuan said to her in an attempt to start changing her mindset.

"I'm so impressed with myself!" Wang Shishi murmured.

"You've always been impressive, and maybe you will be better than me soon." Luo Yuan continued building her courage. "Telekinesis has always been one of the strongest powers in

movies!” He added.

Wang Shishi was still very young. She smiled upon hearing all these compliments.

“Still scared now?” Luo Yuan followed up.

“Not anymore!” Wang Shishi said confidently.

“Then you can let go of me now or Huang Jiahui’s gonna be jealous,” Luo Yuan teased.

“What nonsense? Since when was I jealous,” Huang Jiahui quickly defended herself.

Only then did Wang Shishi realize that she was still hugging Luo Yuan with her breasts resting against his chest. She quickly took a few steps back but her face was already flushed in embarrassment. “Brother Luo, I’m going to ignore you if you keep saying things like that.” She added.

The people who had run away earlier did not go too far and were watching the scene from where they were hiding. They came out of hiding once the mutated beast was killed. The few of them who stood nearer to the scene saw how Wang Shishi killed the mutated beast, and soon everyone knew about it.

“Brother Luo, is this young lady evolved?” Huo Dong asked in surprise.

Luo Yuan nodded. This could not be hidden anymore and there was no need to hide the fact now.

Everyone's faces were different now. Their expressions were a mixture of envy and wary. To the public, evolved people had only existed like legends. Nobody had really seen them even though they had heard a lot about them. The news of this fragile pretty young lady being an evolved person came as a surprise to them.

“And you?” Huo Dong asked again.

“Me too!” Luo Yuan answered.

It was suddenly silent.

Luo Yuan pulled Wang Shishi over and said, “There's still some distance to go, let's move.”

Everyone nodded. They appeared the same on the surface but Luo Yuan was now someone with a higher status.

As they approached the dead centipede, Luo Yuan asked Wang Shishi, “Can you find the flying shuttle?”

He had only made her one shuttle. If she lost this one, she would not be able to get a new weapon any time soon.

“I think I can sense where it is...” Wang Shishi said and closed her eyes to focus. Suddenly, the flying shuttle floated above the ground and hovered over her head.

“What did you mean by you can sense it?” Luo Yuan questioned.

Wang Shishi thought about it and said vaguely, “I don’t know either. Maybe because I’ve used it so much, I feel connected to the shuttle. There was once when I misplaced it but eventually realized I could sense it before going to sleep that night. It’s like there’s a string between us... I can feel it if it’s not too far from me.”

Luo Yuan was skeptical. Telekinesis should be a subgroup of Sensory evolutions according to what he understood. If telekinesis had such effects, maybe he could try it out to see if Sensory evolution had the same effect.

He did not think too deep into it for the moment as the team continued to jog forward after Wang Shishi pocketed her shuttle.

The journey was smooth and they did not encounter anymore mutated beasts. Some ten minutes later, they arrived at a nondescript 3-story building. “Hedong City’s 3rd Dugout” were the words written in gold on the building.

Everyone looked dejected when they saw the entrance. A sturdy looking steel door which looked at least ten centimeters thick stood in their path.

“Someone’s been here before,” a man said in a low voice.

Luo Yuan nodded. “Knock the door first!” He said to him.

Their hearts turned heavy. One by one they entered through the security door. Following Luo Yuan’s instructions, a young man picked up a brick and threw it against the door. A dull thud was heard which indicated to them the incredible thickness of the door.

“Is anyone there? Open the door, please!”

With Luo Yuan’s enhanced hearing ability, he heard whisperings from the other side of the door that quickly quietened down.

The young man repeatedly knocked on the door with the brick and shouted for someone to open it. An impatient voice finally came from the other side after a minute and said, “It’s full here. Go somewhere else.”

“Open the door, there are only a few of us. It will make do if we squeezed a little,” a skinny man shouted.

“Yeah, be kind and let us in.” Other members added.

“Are you done? I said we can’t fit anymore in here. It’s useless however much you beg. Use this time to go to other dugouts,” the voice from the other side yelled in reply.

The young man who knocked the door was obviously ill-tempered. He slammed the brick against the steel door and yelled, “F*ck you! This dugout is not your home! A dugout that can house up to tens of thousands of people. It’s not possible that it cannot fit the few of us. Open the door!”

“You selfish idiot! Don’t think I don’t know what you guys are thinking! All of you will end up in hell one day.”

“What can you do if I don’t open this door? Bite me?” the voice on the other side replied.

Both sides were now arguing with each other through the shut steel door.

“Step aside... Let me.” Luo Yuan suddenly said with a serious face.

Chapter 90: Scapegoat

Luo Yuan dashed towards the door with his sabre in hand. He stabbed the tip of his sabre through the metal door which was three to four inches thick but was no match for his dark blue level weapon. It pierced through the door as easily as a hot knife cutting through butter. Uproar could be heard on the other side.

“Open the door or I will tear it down.” Luo Yuan demanded in a stern voice.

“OKAY! PLEASE! STOP! WE’LL OPEN IT!”

Luo Yuan backed away from the door and it slowly creaked open to them. A terrified group of people were watching helplessly as Luo Yuan and his followers walked in. A few men on the inside were armed with pistols and two of them even had rifles.

The leader, a tall and well-built man, had a scar that ran from the gap between his eyebrows to the tip of his lip. He was a terrifying looking man. He observed the sabre that Luo Yuan was holding and spoke, “Okay, man. We let you in, so you gotta follow the rules now, alright? If you’re gonna cause any trouble, don’t say that I never told you the rules.”

The crowd behind Luo Yuan was quiet at the sight of their guns. Even the young man who was furiously pounding on the door moments ago kept quiet.

“I love rules. They are what that distinguishes us from animals.”

Luo Yuan smiled in reply.

His body released an intimidating aura that could easily scare light blue level mutants let alone a group of normal human beings who have all involuntarily spaced out. The leader was petrified, his face was pale and sweat was dripping from the tip of his forehead. He couldn't move and gulped while trying to speak. Then, the aura dissipated.

“And, as for not opening the door, well, I understand the situation so I won't go into that any further. I mean, we don't know if the people outside are friends or foe, right?” Luo Yuan added.

The crowd sighed in relief and came to realize that they were drenched in their own sweat. Some of them were even shaking. They looked at Luo Yuan as if they'd seen a ghost. They then snapped out of their momentary daze and quickly followed Luo Yuan who had already made his way down the stairs. Scarface kept reaching for his pistol in the holster on his waist. He was undecided and confused as to what would be his next move but he eventually decided not to act because he knew that if he dared to pull out his gun, it wouldn't be his opponent who would be dead. He instantly knew that this is no typical man... this man is much more terrifying than the mutants in the wild and could probably outfight all the men in here with his fists alone.

Luo Yuan reached the bottom of the stairs to find a corridor filled with tents. Despite how late it was (around 2 am) the sound of mutants and monsters' howling through the night could be heard. They were terrifying. Parents were lulling their children, young

couples were holding tightly to each other, no one dared to take more than a glance at Luo Yuan and the crowd.

“How many people are there?” he asked.

“A few hundred, give or take. People from the neighboring villages came to seek refuge when the explosions started yesterday.” Scarface reluctantly replied him from behind.

Luo Yuan nodded in acknowledgment, surprised by how crowded the place actually is. “Are there sufficient provisions?”

“Most bring their own provisions, three to five days’ worth. I’m afraid we won’t be able to provide if it’s any longer than that.” Scarface hesitated a moment before asking, “What is it like now... out... there?”

Luo Yuan walked on without replying.

Huo Dong decided to speak on behalf of Luo Yuan, “We didn’t want to say this but honestly, Hedong City has fallen and the military has retreated to the underground facilities after the mutants invaded. Jiangnan is also done for. We’ve got no backup and no miracles. I’m afraid we’ll be staying here for quite some time.”

Several women in the crowd began wailing, intensifying the already gloomy situation.

Luo Yuan spoke again, “I need two tents, have you got any left?”

“Of course! I’ll have my men bring it to you.” Scarface waved and a skinny chimp-like man ran into the crowd and prompted an outrage.

“WHAT THE F*CK ARE YOU DOING? You can’t do this! This is MY TENT! You’re robbing me! STOP IT YOU A*SHOLE!” a woman raged.

“You shut your mouth, woman! You should be grateful that we would want anything from the likes of you. Here’s some provision-tickets, my boss is buying your tents!” the skinny man grabbed a handful of the tickets and hurled it at the woman’s face.

“How dare you hit me, YOU F*CKING BASTARD! YOU DON’T MAKE NO F*CKING SENSE! F*CK YOU!”

The man next to the woman, presumably her husband, stared in disbelief. He gently tugged his wife and whispered, “It’s okay, honey. Just let them have the tent. We can’t afford to start an argument here. Okay?”

She shoved his hand aside, turned and assaulted him, “JUST A TENT? HAVE YOU LOST YOUR F*CKING BALLS? I only married you because everyone else said you were kind and honest. Back then, I didn’t want to say much because that’s the kind of man that everybody wanted to marry. BUT NOW? We’re being pushed around, our home has been taken away from us, and YOU’RE NOT EVEN MAD? Have you even thought about where we are supposed

to sleep without a tent?!”

“C’mon, honey. There’s no point bringing my personality into it. We’re outnumbered here. Even if you did want to fight back, they’ve got guns! We can’t fight against that. Just let it go. The tents are just materialistic goods that we can do without anyway. Stop fighting against them. Let it go.” The husband replied.

She didn’t know what else to say or do, so she sat on the ground in despair. She cried.

People were standing around them, spectating, but no one dared to stand too close. Frustrated by his failed acquisition, the skinny man drew a metal baton from his back and marched towards the crying woman.

Huang Jiahui could not stand it anymore and pinched Luo Yuan’s arm. He sighed at what had transpired, knowing that he’s not that cold-blooded. “STOP!” He yelled.

The skinny man shuddered and stopped in his footsteps. He turned to look at Luo Yuan.

Luo Yuan looked conflictingly at the couple. He couldn’t stand what was happening as he too had come from a civilized society and in this case, he was the one at fault.

“Come back and just leave them be. It’s not right to harm innocent people. Just give me two of your tents!” Luo Yuan told

Scarface.

Scarface froze, resisting the urge to shout back at Luo Yuan to tell him it is unfair for him to bully them.

“So? Do you have it or not?” Luo Yuan asked again.

“Why of course. Of course we do!”

“Then why are you still standing there? Bring them over. NOW!” Luo Yuan demanded.

Scarface reluctantly ordered, “Xiao Cao! Luo Ping! Bring two of our tents here for this man now!” As a leader, it is only natural that he would not personally deliver the tents. He has men to do his dirty work.

“Roger that, boss Hao!” they both replied.

The two selected men, embarrassed, left unwillingly and returned shortly with two tents. Under the instruction of Scarface, they set up the tents in a vacant corridor.

“You smoke?” Luo Yuan took out a wrinkled cigarette and asked. Ever since the change, his addiction has been getting worse. He takes a smoke at every chance he can get during stressful situations.

Scarface nodded and Luo Yuan gave him a cigarette. He refrained from sharing it with the others as this is his only box left.

“What’s your name?” Luo Yuan asked as he lit his cigarette.

“Su Jianhao but people here call me Boss Hao.” He inhaled deeply and gently puffed.

“If you’re planning to kill me, I’d suggest you do it at night.” Luo Yuan said and then paused as he looked around and pointed, “This spot right here. It’s a good spot. It’s a great spot for a stealthy entrance. Moreover, the straight pathway means there is nowhere to run or hide. All you need is a gun and a good aim. Would you like me to demonstrate?”

Su Jianhao panicked and tried to run from his seat but it was too late as a dark blue level blade was already resting on his throat. He had no choice but to sit back down. His face was discolored, and the hand he used to hold the cigarette began to shake. The chilly sensation on his throat functioned as a reminder that if he tried to move, the blade would cut right through without hesitation.

His throat moved as he gulped, “But, sir. I...I think you’ve misunderstood my intentions.”

One of Su Jianhao’s men saw what was happening and pulled out his pistol, “WHAT ARE YOU DOING? Put down your weapon or...” Schink!

Before the man could finish his sentence, Scarface noticed that his captor had gone out of his sight, and within a second, blood splattered all over his body. He looked at his comrade gripping tightly on his own throat but was unable to cover the wound that kept bleeding profusely. He fell to the ground and he eventually died.

Su Jianhao was in shock-his mouth was wide open, his heart was pounding in his chest, and his eyes were tearing.

“If anyone tries to pull a gun at me again, that would be their end.” Luo Yuan threatened as the air around them seemed to have turned chilly. Another follower of Su Jianhao’s who was present surrendered. He put his gun down on the ground and his hands were up in the air. He was too afraid to move.

The kill happened so fast that it was barely visible to the naked eye. It took him no more than a second to kill and return to his initial position. Wang Shishi was shocked by what she just witnessed and held back a scream with her hands covering her mouth. Huang Jiahui sighed as she held her tightly.

“Good boy. Now, where were we?” Luo Yuan giggled.

“Mm-mmmisunderstanding. Th-thi-this was just a big misunderstanding. I never had the intention to kill any of you. I SWEAR!” Su Jianhao struggled to speak calmly as he remained petrified. As the blade drew closer to his skin he realized that he had never felt death so close to him before. He was drenched in his own sweat and almost wet his trousers.

“Misunderstanding – schmisunderstanding. If you have a death wish, all you have to do is ask and I’ll kindly oblige by gently moving my blade. I suppose you know what you should and shouldn’t do. You have only once chance and you clearly only live once. It’s all up to you, got it?”

“Y-yy-yes sir” Scarface replied.

“Very well. Take the body away and clean up the damn mess before you leave. DON’T forget to bring us our breakfast tomorrow.” Luo Yuan instructed as the tents had been set up.

“Yes sir!” he replied again.

After the mess was cleaned up, Su Jianhao and his men left – only the group that followed Luo Yuan stayed behind.

“I knew from the very beginning that they weren’t good people! They think themselves kings within these walls! You’ve made one of their men a scapegoat now. We might have to be careful tonight. Since we won’t be able to sleep, we’ll stay up and take watch of the entrance.” Huo Dong suggested aloud.

“Yeah, the day’s almost breaking and we won’t be sleeping much anyway! Let’s just take watch for a night.” Someone in the crowd agreed.

In an apocalypse, power is everything. As Luo Yuan had now

demonstrated his abilities, many had begun to follow him.

“I understand your concern for me but there are more families out there that could use your help.” Luo Yuan replied.

“As you wish, Brother Luo. We’ll leave you to rest for the night.”

Chapter 91: Night Chatter

Why aren't there any mattresses in these tents? Then again, the weather has been quite hot recently – some nights the temperature can get to as high as twenty degrees. We probably would not feel cold without blankets anyway. Hmm and the flooring of the tent... it's spongy...and it feels quite soft! How lucky.

“Hey, they're both the same. Which tent would you prefer?” he turned and asked Wang Shishi.

“Umm...I'm scared to sleep alone tonight...Do you mind if I slept in the same tent together with the two of you?” Wang Shishi was still traumatized from what had happened recently.

Luo Yuan and Huang Jiahui looked at each other and came to an agreement. “Sure.”

It was a night filled with too much gore for a young lady that even Huang Jiahui would have had nightmares. What more could they expect from an inexperienced girl like Wang Shishi? If they left her to sleep alone, the accumulated stress would most likely have broken her.

The trio walked together into the tent and Luo Yuan zipped the entrance closed.

Huang Jiahui made sure to check that her pistol was close to her before she lied down to sleep. She assumed that Wang Shishi would be sleeping next to her and decided to leave some space but

she was wrong – Wang Shishi was in fact sleeping on the other side, cuddling very closely to Luo Yuan. She felt a little frustrated but decided to let it go as she could see Wang Shishi was trembling helplessly. As long as we're all safe and alive, she thought.

“Brother Luo, would those baddies attempt to kill us in our sleep?” Wang Shishi whispered into Luo Yuan's ear as she was struggling to fall asleep.

“Well, if they had any common sense, they would certainly avoid coming to us. Besides, they also need to sleep. You can sleep safe and sound tonight.” He replied.

“You...deliberately killed that man, didn't you?” Huang Jiahui questioned Luo Yuan hesitantly. Wang Shishi's eyes began to widen after hearing that question.

He kept silent for a moment before replying, “When you were a cop, were you ever afraid when confronting a criminal?”

“Of course not!” Huang Jiahui replied instantly.

“The reason was because you always had a gun with you; it helps amplify your courage and strength which indirectly makes you feel more authoritative and overpowering.

Those men had more than one gun and from the looks of it none of them were good men. Even if I didn't want to, I had to kill that man as a warning just in case any of them dared to challenge us.”

“That’s a person’s life! You should have just punished him instead of kill him.”

“Did you even think about what would have happened, if they deemed us weaker than them?”

“Well...perhaps you could have just cut off one of his limbs instead...” she abruptly stopped mid-sentence, surprised by what she had just said.

“Haha! That would have been worse than death. In our current situation, it would have been better if he died than lived and endure being tortured.” He replied.

Wang Shishi could not stand it any longer, “Sister Huang, please STOP going against Brother Luo! He was just trying to keep us safe! If it weren’t for him, we would both be DEAD by now!”

Huang Jiahui was taken aback by the accusation, “Oh? Why don’t you help our dear Brother Luo then? Weren’t you upset with him just now, and said you hated him?”

“Well...I WAS angry and depressed when I said that! But I am well aware that he means well.”

“Oh, stop being such a kiss – ass!”

“I’M NOT KISSING HIS ASS. I know that Brother Luo IS a nice person okay!”

Luo Yuan felt elated listening to the two ladies bickering away, even though he was really tired and could feel his eyelids gradually grow heavier. He had gone out the whole day without getting any rest; he wasn’t only physically tired but mentally exhausted as well. As he began to relax, the exhaustion through his body erupted like a volcano.

He began to snore and slowly their voices became softer and softer.

“Brother Luo, have you fallen asleep already?”

“He must have been completely worn out. He was out the whole day, although we have no idea what he was doing... it must have been taxing. We should let him rest.” Huang Jiahui whispered quietly. She felt much safer seeing that even in his sleep, he held on to the hilt of his sabre tightly.

She may have sounded harsh earlier but she knew deep inside that Wang Shishi was right-without him, they wouldn’t have made it this far.

Inside the other path which was down through the tunnel is the living quarters of Su Jianhao. The location was roughly separated by loose planks – there you could find a couch, coffee table and ten men huddling around the quarters. It was filled with can drinks, chips, alcohol, and cigarette butts all over the floor. The air was

densely polluted with smoke, which made it difficult to even open one's eyes.

Su Jianhao was sitting on the couch; he felt gloomy and couldn't bring himself to stop smoking. He had been subconsciously reaching for his throat several times, unable to forget the blade that had sent chills down his spine.

"Brother Hao... Please! Let me send a few men to get rid of those arrogant bastards." One of his curly-haired adolescent men stood up and spoke in outrage.

"Don't be reckless, Xiao Hu. Sit down and just do as Brother Hao says." A brutal-looking middle-aged man replied, he then turns to Su Jianhao, "Brother Hao. We can't just sit here and do nothing! PLEASE SAY SOMETHING!"

Su Jianhao took a deep huff of the cigarette and threw the butt to the ground as he raised his head. Only ten minutes of work had passed but he looked as if he hadn't been sleeping for nights. He finally spoke, "Y'all been following me for almost seven to eight years now... even the shortest would be about four to five. Y'all should know well what kind of man I am. I am as angered by Guo Zi's death as much as the rest of you and maybe even more outraged than you can imagine. He had died...because of me. I want to slice that bastard into pieces but anger won't solve the problem. He outwits every single one of us. We can't take the risk, at least not yet. That prick is an evolved man. He has accelerated speed and I'm afraid our guns will do us no good against him. Don't forget that he has become aware of us now."

“Evolved man?!” his men gasped.

Most of the men who are evolved are part of the military program, but there are a few that roam among the commoners. They keep a low-profile due to various circumstances. Should any of you pass by an evolved man, you would not be aware of their presence. That is why the evolved men are seen as an urban legend in the eyes of the commoners – it is more likely to hear about them than to ever get the chance to encounter any of them.

“That little prick is a ruthless man – he won’t hesitate to take a life or two. Y’all best not do anything stupid to provoke him, y’all got to be smart. BE NICE, treat him like royalty, give him anything he wants, and send him a few of our best women. We need to gain a bit of his trust before we plan to ambush him. HUANG! You’re a detailed man. We’ll leave the ass-kissery to you.

“Roger that, Brother Hao. I know exactly what to do.” The middle-aged man replied.

His men all sighed in relief after having heard what their leader had in mind. Luo Yuan has left a deep wound in their impressions – cold, cruel and unmerciful. They felt safer not having to go against the “devil”... at least not yet.

Suddenly, the door broke open. The men were all taken aback; some of them quickly armed themselves with their weapons. It was the wife of their boss, so they calmed down.

“WHY ARE YOU GENTLEMEN STILL AWAKE?! It’s almost two

in the morning! SU JIANHAO! Our child is sick with high fever and you're not doing anything about it! AND STOP SMOKING THAT PIECE OF SHIT, YOU'RE BOUND TO GET LUNG CANCER. DISMISS YOUR BLOODY ASSEMBLY NOW!"

"Yes, ma'am!" all the men obeyed.

Su Jianhao stood up and waved his right hand, "You heard the lady, go and get some sleep! Huang, I trust you know what to do tomorrow."

The middle-aged man nodded in response as the men quickly scattered back to their own quarters.

Chapter 92: Radiation

Luo Yuan was startled from his slumber by noises from outside the tent. He instinctively gripped the handle of his sabre and slowly opened his eyes. He tried to gently maneuver his way out between the limbs of the two ladies but they were instantly woken by his not so gentle movements.

“What’s going on?” Huang Jiahui was alarmed and grabbed hold of her pistol.

“No no no. It’s nothing. Go back to sleep. I’m just going to take a look outside” he said as he unzipped the tent and walked towards the noise.

There was an argument happening and it was loud even though the people tried to lower their voices.

“You’re letting us eat this crap?!”

“How is it supposed to fill our hunger? The porridge is so thin I can see my own reflection!”

“Get yo leader’s ass here right now! I don’t believe y’all have insufficient provision for the few of us here. Are you trying to piss off our Boss Luo?”

“Calm down, fellow brethren. Please try to understand. Yes, we do have sufficient provisions but that doesn’t mean we can afford

to splurge it all at once. We don't know how long we'll be in here – we can't just feast luxuriously now and worry about it later.” A middle-aged man explained while trying to offer a bitter smile. His explanation did calm the outrage as the crowd contemplated the possibility of provision deficiency.

Before he could continue justifying the lack of food provided, the middle-aged man was muted at the sight of Luo Yuan walking over with his murderous weapon. He froze.

“Boss Luo!”

“Oh...Boss Luo. You're awake. I'm so sorry to have disturbed you.” The middle-aged man apologized generously with a big smile and a low bow.

Luo Yuan recognized that this was one of Su Jianhao's henchmen, who seemed skilled with false pleasantries and honeyed words – definitely not a person to simply underestimate.

He frowned as he walked towards the big pot and saw how thin and transparent the porridge was – so thin he could see the bottom of the pot, and so little that each person would only have a single serving that could hardly fill their hunger. There was a dish of stir-fried vegetables that was equally minimal placed right next to the pot. He examined it with a spatula and left it as it was.

The middle-aged man's name is Huang Zhongchan. He attempted to repeat his rehearsed lines about curbing the possibility of provision deficiency but failed as he looked at Luo Yuan. His

forehead wrinkled, his heart was beating quickly against his chest and his palms were sweaty and he felt like he released buckets of sweat. He couldn't help but be reminded of what Luo Yuan was capable of – the monster seems calm now but for how long? Had he known Luo Yuan would show up he would have decided against delivering the food on his own, but it is now too late.

Luo Yuan looked at Huang Zhongchan, not saying a word, scaring him pale and he could hardly smile. He did wait for Luo Yuan to speak, “I...I'll take this back and bring a fresh pot of rice instead.”

Luo Yuan could see the fear in Huang Zhongchan's eyes. He was amazed by fear he could impose on others by killing a man. He replied, “Well? Why are you still here? GET TO IT THEN.”

Huang Zhongchan sighed in relief that he wasn't about to be slaughtered. He quickly summoned two other lackeys to have the pot of porridge removed and then hurried away.

It didn't take long for a fresh pot of rice to arrive. This time, a proper meal was prepared – even more so than the meals they had when they were still at the villa. He did not eat together with the men but instead took his food and walked into the tunnel.

When he returned to the tent, the ladies had awoken from their sleep and were brushing their teeth with a small basin of water that was brought over.

“How much drinking water do we have left?” he asked. They had

accidentally dropped their luggage while they were trying to escape the day before. The only things they have left are those that were in their backpacks, which isn't much.

“Last I checked we had five bottles of water and some vacuum-sealed biscuits left. The rest are just money and some strips of gold...which I'm afraid are useless to us here.” Huang Jiahui answered.

“Get rid of the provision tickets. They have no value anymore. Let's keep the water and biscuits as our emergency provision.” He frowned again as he felt the earth tremor lightly, “It's not safe for us here. We need to get out as soon as we can.”

“BUT WHY, Brother Luo? Isn't it safer here, under the solid bunker where no monsters can intrude?” Wang Shishi quickly interjected, surprised by how soon he had planned for them to leave.

“Do we really have to leave?” Huang Jiahui added calmly.

He nodded and said, “No matter how safe it may seem, this is still an incomplete underground bunker. The provisions they've prepared are clearly not enough. The refugees may have brought their own provision but that's only sufficient for three to five days, any longer and a riot is bound to break out. I may not have starved myself but I can imagine how crazy a whole bunker of starving men would become. How about we leave after a few days of good rest?”

“But...where can we go?” the girls asked.

“We could return to the villa first as we have enough food and supplies prepared that can last us for about a year or maybe even more. And besides, maybe by then these monsters would have left the area due to the lack of food.”

Wang Shishi had to resist the urge to vomit after hearing him describe the monsters eating the other humans in such a casual manner.

“Would the people here die?” Huang Jiahui couldn’t help but ask, worried about the lives of the innocent and the suffering.

Luo Yuan understood her sentiments, so he sighed and responded, “Compared to the people on the outside? They’re quite lucky to be alive for the time being. If it’s about ten or thirty or forty people, I might be able to help them out but I’ve estimated that there are about a thousand or more of them here. Even if we did supply them the entire villa’s provisions, how many days would we all survive? Don’t think too much into it, eat.”

He brought out his bowl of rice but any appetite he had left was now gone. He took a few mouthfuls and just left the food as it is, feeling surprisingly guilty. He understood that this sort of survivor’s guilt can be quite dangerous. He also understands that he’d have to risk his own life going out hunting monsters for food to feed so many people. He’ll have to wait and see if anyone wants to follow them when they leave, then and maybe only then, will he decide if he can save any of them.

Luo Yuan woke up the next morning finding that many people could not stop vomiting and running to the toilet. Their skin began to itch and rashes covered their bodies. Many also came down with severe fever. By the afternoon, even Huang Jiahui started to fall ill, weak to the bones, unable to move.

He initially thought it was an epidemic, causing mass hysteria in the underground bunker. One of the things that they lack most these days is medical supplies. Any epidemic could prove to be deadly to the diminishing population especially when they are not able to tell whether their illness is the result of genetic mutations – of which they would have no vaccine or antidote to fight against.

A young man determined that this was the side-effect of being exposed to severe radiation. He was a doctor but one that lacked medical supplies to aid the fallen men and women. He couldn't do much but to ask Luo Yuan to fetch some salt water for the sick to drink.

Luo Yuan may not be a doctor but he was a science major back in university and he knew that iodized salt contained potassium iodide which functions to prevent the radiation from further entering the veins but does not protect the body from other kinds of radiation such as nuclear radiation. However, they have no other options.

Several hours after drinking the salt water, Huang Jiahui miraculously recovered. He wasn't sure if it was the salt or her body's natural healing that helped her recover from the illness. Unfortunately, on the second day, three men died from the

exposure to the radiation. On the third day, most of the sick had recovered almost completely. The doctor couldn't help but be surprised by this miracle.

Luo Yuan was certain that the human body had not gone through the same mutation as the beasts and monsters they encountered but it has nonetheless improved. What was once considered as a deadly radiation may no longer be as lethal as it was before the apocalypse – just as how Luo Yuan and Wang Shishi's bodies were hardly affected by the radiation.

Chapter 93: Choice

Luo Yuan punched the air relentlessly, which produced sounds like fireworks!

Sun Xiaowu who was standing at the passage entrance was watching the incredibly fast punches from Luo Yuan with eagerness; he then swallowed and passed a towel to Luo Yuan when he stopped huffing.

“What happened outside? What was causing all the noise?” he asked as Luo Yuan wiped his sweat with the towel he received.

This young man who had smashed the door out of anger earlier seemed to really admire Luo Yuan, he was aggressive and brute, but he was a simple man. Ever since he witnessed what Luo Yuan was capable of, he was enthusiastically trying to befriend Luo Yuan. Luo Yuan did not reject his friendship; instead, he tasked him to collect information.

“Someone passed away again. Those people who were starving are ruthless for a mouthful of food... recently a baby was stampeded on when they were fighting, it was terrible.” Sun Xiaowu spoke softly and continued, “But nobody dares to provoke us, a lot of people have been avoiding us after what they had witnessed.”

It has only been five days since Luo Yuan entered the dugout. With the depletion of food, irritable anxiety began to permeate the once peaceful dugout. Injuries and death were an everyday

occurrence and the stench of decomposing corpses filled the air.

“What about Su Jianhao and his gang?” Luo Yuan asked.

“There has been no news from them, perhaps they are afraid. Other than Huang Chongshan and a few others, I haven’t seen anyone else the past few days. I’ve also collected the information you asked for... Su Jianhao used to be the boss of the Xingan Gang in Hedong City’s Anpu Area but he gradually turned the gang legal a few years ago. I heard that he had killed a few people before.”

Luo Yuan nodded and after some thought lifted his head and spoke, “Tell the people outside who want to follow me that we will depart later this afternoon.”

“We’re leaving this dugout?” Sun Xiaowu asked alarmingly.

He nodded and took a sip from his bottle before resuming his workout. He had said what was needed to be said. It was up to them if they could discern the situation or wanted to listen.

The strong gust of the wind from Luo Yuan’s punches made Sun Xiaowu’s clothes flutter. He slowly calmed down after looking at Luo Yuan who was inhumanely strong, “I understand, I will go and inform the others now.”

Luo Yuan did not say anything else as he continued punching.

“Why are we leaving? It’s dangerous to be outside. The man-

eating mutated beasts are everywhere. We finally made it to this dugout, why are we going out again?" A young woman asked anxiously.

"Yeah, Xiaowu, please talk to Boss Luo. Why take the risk? The conditions here are bad but at least we are safe. Where will we go once we leave? What will we eat?"

"Why can't you understand that the food here is limited? A lot of people are already beginning to starve! We need to leave here sooner or later, why not now?" Sun Xiaowu said loudly.

"I understand this logic but I don't plan to go out anymore. I have heart problems; I won't be able to withstand the environment outside. Actually, what would we do when we leave? Maybe we will die as soon as we leave. If I remain here I may survive for a few more days, that itself is enough for me to stay." A middle-aged man sighed in reply.

Everyone could understand the situation easily. It was just that if one had to choose between temporary enjoyment and a future filled with danger, most of the people would lean towards the former. The future was uncertain, only the present was real. He really did not want to leave. This place was almost like heaven compared to the world outside. His heart thumped faster just from the thought of that gory night.

"I'm not leaving either. I'm fat and won't be able to run fast. I'll only slow you all down if I follow" a plump middle-aged man shook his head after being in a daze.

“If Boss Luo can guarantee our safety, we will leave,” a young man in a blue tracksuit responded in a soft voice.

Before Sun Xiaowu could say anything, Huo Dong who wanted to stand out sneered loudly, “Very funny, no one is begging you to leave. Who do you think you are to Boss Luo? Did you give him money or save his life? We can still breathe and have something to eat now thanks to Boss Luo. It’s fine if you don’t plan to repay his kindness but don’t drag him behind, you’re so ungrateful!”

“Please don’t distort the trust... it’s up to you to kiss someone’s feet but don’t use me as your stepping stone. Since Boss Luo is asking us to leave, he should at least be responsible for our safety. Otherwise, who would follow him?” He defended himself and flustered while despising gaze landed on him from all around.

“Ren Qi, are you able to kill mutated beasts or humans? Look at you, fair-skinned and young, you probably couldn’t even kill a chicken! What can you do besides selling your ass? Trash like you regard yourself too highly,” Huo Dong Sneered. He initially had the intention to entertain but he was really angered now that he met such an unreasonable person.

The man named Ren Qi was furious and charged forward but was tripped by god knows who and fell to the ground. Everyone around him scattered and not one soul was willing to lend him a hand.

A girl hesitantly walked over to help him but was pushed away. She almost slipped as she staggered a few steps back. Her eyes

started to get filled with tears.

“Ning Xiaoran, I don’t need your fake sympathy. Does every one of you see me as a joke? Just you wait, all of you will regret this,” he angrily stared at everyone around him as if he wanted to remember every single person before he shoved aside those watching and left.

Luo Yuan wiped his machete and sheathed it back into its scabbard.

His possessions were scarce... only a tent and a backpack.

Luo Yuan had initially wanted to leave the tent behind but thought that it might come in handy in case of emergencies and so he packed it along.

The tent looked big but once folded, it was only the size of a duffel bag. It was light and did not hinder his movements. Besides, the distance would be short if everything went smoothly. It would take at most 2 – 3 hours to reach Jingyue residential area.

Some 20 – 30 came together but only 5 left in unison now.

Other than Huo Dong, Sun Xiaowu and 30-year-old Chen Xianfeng who was rather expressionless, there were also two other women. From Luo Yuan’s memory, one of them was the lady who reminded them about this dugout earlier. She was pretty judging from Sun Xiaowu’s passing glances. The other one looked young,

about 18 – 19 years old, and was quiet and small like a student.

Everyone was watching them with mixed emotions; their stares had a hint of sympathy.

“Only these few?” Luo Yuan asked.

“Most of them didn’t want to leave,” Huo Dong said.

Luo Yuan scanned the crowd as they tried to avoid his gaze. He sighed inwardly thinking, everyone has their own choice. Who would know who was right and wrong? Perhaps staying here was the best choice for them.

“You pick your own road, now let’s leave!” Luo Yuan inhaled deeply and said.

The crowd sent them away. For some, their hearts faintly regretted the decision to stay.

Su Jianhao’s brows were locked together. He was basically smoking cigarette after cigarette. Within a few days, he became thin and seemed to have aged several years. Every day he was woken up by nightmares, constantly feeling the chill down his throat. It was driving him nuts. He didn’t even dare to go out. To the people outside, he would say it was because his son had a strange high fever; but on the inside, he was really scared and did not dare to meet the man.

If it had been in his old days, he would have stood up against Luo Yuan without hesitation. Everyone would have been afraid when the name ‘Lunatic Hao’ from Xingan Gang was mentioned last time.

The aggression and bravery from his youth had been washed away by age, especially since he had gone legal for several years now, being as businessman-like as he could be. He knew how to calculate gains and loss, and discerned when to tolerate or retreat.

Suddenly, the doors were pushed open with a bang! Su Jianhao almost jumped with a twitch, but seeing that it was only Huang Chongshan, he said unhappily, “How many times have I told you... knock before you come in.”

“They left...They finally...” Huang Chongshan could not even register what he had just said, his body was trembling from excitement and suddenly he realized the implications of his words. He swallowed the other half of his sentence and took a breather before saying, “They finally...ran, do we chase after them?”

“Left?” Su Jianhao was surprised, and continued, “They come and go as they wish! These scums must have enjoyed themselves the past few days, eh? A dozen of them must have already died by now, right? Discarding their bodies all over the place and making the dugout smell so bad. If I wasn’t so busy with my things recently, I’d have gone against them.”

A dozen? But he only killed one person, Huang Chongshan thought. His boss seems to have gotten it wrong. Yet from his many years of experience being Su Jianhao’s right wing man,

Huang Chongshan knew him inside out. He knew that he should only go along with the words that were spoken and smiled, “Brother Hao, you should have stood out earlier. Then we will see who would dare to defy you and I’ll shoot them down.”

“Right, so who wanted to leave? They must have guts for not being afraid to be eaten by the beasts,” Su Jianhao calmed down after venting and said calmly.

“It’s the murderous devil, he just left.”

“Murderous devil...” Su Jianhao was stunned before suddenly standing, the ashes from the cigarette in his hand began to scatter, “The murderous devil you mean, That Luo something?”

“Boss Luo... that Luo Yuan guy, he just left.” Huang Chongshan said once more in agitation.

“His reaction was pretty fast,” Su Jianhao’s eyebrows raised as he sneered and took a long drag from his cigarette.

In an instant, Huang Chongshan could feel the return of the old Brother Hao. He was filled with high spirits and his interlocking brows smoothened. Even the wrinkles between his eyes were radiating with joy. The gloomy cloud that had been looming over him these recent days was gone in the blink of an eye. Huang Chongshan quickly retracted his gaze, lowering his head slightly to conceal what he was thinking.

“How long has he been gone?” Su Jianhao asked.

“About ten minutes ago, I was the one who opened the door for him.” Huang Chongshan said smiling as he elaborated once more, worried that his boss would misunderstand, “Initially, the Luo... loser was about to break the lock with his sharp knife.”

“Forget it, I don’t blame you guys. No use throwing your lives away for such petty things.” Su Jianhao said generously.

“Thank you for your consideration, Brother Hao. Some of them didn’t leave with him though. Should we still continue to send them meals after this?” Huang Chongshan asked.

“Send them meals? Are you f*king stupid? Do you think my food drops from heaven!?” Su Jianhao said furiously, “I’m glad they didn’t leave... I want them to vomit whatever food they’ve eaten from me, especially the rice we provided them.”

Of course, he had only sent them meals before when the murderous devil was still here as he posed a big threat. Now that the devil has left, if he continued to provide food for them, that would only show that he, Su Jianhao, was utterly scared of the devil. That would not sit well with those who had been following him. Without enforcing authority, they would no longer stay loyal to him. He would not only stop providing meals to them but also get payback.

“I understand.” Huang Chongshan understood more than what was being said, “Do you want me to call them over?”

“No, that would be regarding them too highly. Let them starve for a few more days. They can go and steal the food if they don’t get to eat. There are too many people here anyway; we can clear a bunch of them through this. After that, we will finish off those who don't obey us by seizing their food. By then, we will be in total control of this dugout. In this era, whoever has the food is the boss... unless you plan to die from starvation,” Su Jianhao said coldly.

“Would this end up getting out of hand?” Even Huang Chongshan who had experienced dark days before could still feel chills just thinking about the number of deaths that was bound to happen.

“What’s there for us to be afraid of when we have guns? The society is wretched now. Nobody would care even if everyone here dies,” Su Jianhao said indifferently.

Chapter 94: Territory

A building had collapsed right across the street which blocked the way. Luo Yuan observed the surroundings from the intersection. Gritting his teeth, he decided to go down another route.

The whole city had fallen beyond recognition within just a few days. Crumbled and damaged buildings were everywhere. Layers of dust covered the roads while human skeletons piled up around the roadside. A few pieces of torn clothes that were stained with dried blood could be seen fluttering in the wind.

Just as Lou Yuan and his group were walking past the skeletons, a colony of black beetles the size of a fingernail scattered out from the pile of skeletons and were gone in the blink of an eye.

A few low level mutated beasts passed by and some had stopped with the intention to hunt as their bloodshot eyes locked on to the group of humans.

An indescribable stench of rotting flesh permeated through the entire city.

It was a picture of absolute desolation!

If not for the howls from the beasts that could be heard further away, this place would certainly have been a ghost town.

Luckily, during their journey, Lou Yuan did not come across a

single large creature-though that did not mean they no longer existed. A territorial aura was emitted a few blocks away. It was obvious that these creatures had divided their territories within the past few days. An oppressive atmosphere could be felt everywhere, making everyone want to just take off and run purely on instinct.

Yet because it was still some distance away, normal people could not sense it. Their senses were too weak. Among the group, only Wang Shishi could feel a hint of the aura that was emitted.

Luo Yuan would certainly have avoided this route if he had any other choice but this beast's territory was too large, ranging from about 5 - 6 kilometer squared. If they wanted to avoid this area it would make for a far more winding route. Furthermore, the neighboring beasts would not be any better.

If Luo Yuan were to be categorized according to the mutated beast's levels, he would only rank as light blue. With the aid of his weapon and combat skills, he could certainly battle against blue level creatures.

It was very risky for a light blue level creature to enter a blue level creature's territory but the meditation that he had practiced was not for nothing. He could already master the manipulation of his own willpower especially after mastering his 'Knife Skills'.

He did his best to contain his thoughts that were held deep in his heart, afraid to expose himself to the beasts. Wang Shishi was not afraid of these creatures as long as Luo Yuan was by her side. She cast her telekinesis powers and her shuttle immediately hovered

over her head.

"Don't do anything!" Luo Yuan immediately stopped her in a quiet voice. "We should cross this place as quick as possible" he added.

"What's up?" Huang Jiahui asked and suddenly noticed that beads of sweat were already dotting Luo Yuan's forehead. She began to tremble as she realised Luo Yuan must have discovered something frightening to summon this type of reaction.

"Boss Luo, please don't scare me" Huo Dong said with forced a smile, attempting to lighten the mood but his voice was also trembling.

Luo Yuan looked at everyone with a grim face, "I'm sorry to tell all of you that an intimidating beast lurks around here. Even for me, running away is the only option! Everyone, please be quiet. We should quickly leave this area."

"Then... Then why didn't we go the other way round?" Ning Xiaoran stuttered, this girl who was normally quiet was obviously horrified by the tensed situation.

"All beasts have their own territories. This might be the most dangerous area but it is also the safest route. Did any of you notice that there are low level mutated beasts all around? We're probably considered similar if not lower rank than these creatures to the beast. If we're lucky, maybe we won't even attract its attention," another female spoke from the group.

Luo Yuan was a little impressed. He could see that she was also afraid but could still maintain a clear mind even when she was scared.

After she felt Luo Yuan's gaze, Cao Ling could not help but straighten her back.

Cao Ling used to be a planning department manager. Her capabilities and social skills were great seeing that she could join the company's higher management team from just a normal employee within five years after graduation despite fierce competition. Most importantly, she always stood out during crucial moments which left a good impression on the higher management.

Being a female during an apocalypse was a direct weakness-she had weak strength, slow speed and was not evolved. However, the competitive pressures she had felt before the apocalypse could match what she was feeling now. She would even sacrifice her body in order to survive.

Luo Yuan who had two women with him seemed to look decent and respected females. That was enough for Cao Ling. Relationships were considered a luxury for females her age. If it were not for the apocalypse, she would probably have gone on a blind date and gotten married in haste.

Sun Xiaowu did not want to be shadowed, especially by a woman this pretty. He laughed dryly, "Hopefully the beast would be full

from feasting and wouldn't want to have us as dessert."

"I should just follow the boss as I'm sure he wouldn't let me get harmed," Chen Xianfeng laughed stiffly as he felt for the dagger by his hips which we had picked up along the way. Someone had probably left it behind amidst the chaos that had occurred.

"Since nobody has any objections, let's keep going." Luo Yuan said after everyone was done speaking.

The streets became eerily quiet, only their footsteps and breathing could be heard. Suddenly, Luo Yuan raised his hand to give a signal. The group stopped at once as they watched Luo Yuan slowly tilt his head to listen to something. Everyone gazed at him nervously not knowing what would happen next.

Suddenly, he turned and ran! A few seconds later, he slid into an alley and accelerated his speed.

Nobody understood what was happening but no one asked as everything was happening in silence.

After a short time had passed, a dull rhythmic thud could be heard coming closer to them from a distance. The sound grew louder and louder and soon, the buildings nearby began to crumble and collapse under the quake.

Ning Xiaoran turned and saw a faint figure of a ferocious and large creature amidst the dust. She could even make out the black

spikes and deformed wings on its back.

"God!" She let out a wail and quickly covered her mouth, afraid that she made too much noise. Fear quickly filled her heart, her limbs grew weak and she was about to collapse onto the ground.

"I mustn't be afraid, I don't want to die, Xiaoran, you can do this!" She bit her lips and quickly regained her energy as she sprinted towards the group that had already left her behind.

They ran for several minutes and finally entered the alley. Luo Yuan checked the surroundings warily and closed his eyes. When he opened them, he gave everyone who was nervous a calm smile and said, "It left! It should be hunting for food. We should be safe for now, at least for this part of the journey."

Everyone was exhausted. It was obvious that they were out of breath and could no longer run. Their energy had depleted much quicker under the influence of fear. Luo Yuan looked at his watch and allowed them to have a 5-minute break since it was still early.

The group quickly took a breather and let out a sigh of relief as they collapsed onto the ground. Ning Xiaoran, who felt as if she had just escaped death, sobbed for a while before wiping her tears away feeling embarrassed. Her clothes were old, covered with dirt and grime. In addition to the blood on her lips, her face was covered in stains from her actions earlier.

Huang Jiahui chuckled lightly and took a moist towel out from her bag, passing it to her and said, "Wipe your face."

“Thank you, thank you!” Ning Xiaoran hurriedly stood up to receive the towel and thanked her.

“This is my towel.” Wang Shishi said as she began to behave as the child she was-murmuring unhappily seeing that Huang Jiahui had mistakenly given away her towel.

Ning Xiaoran had sharp hearing and was quick to thank Wang Shishi which caught her off guard and made her blush.

Luo Yuan laughed but immediately changed his expression as he pulled his machete out. A maroon-colored lump fell onto the ground after only a strike from his blade but that thing was not dead yet! The two halves of its body began to twitch. It looked like an ant with a pair of transparent wings.

“This looks like a mutated ant.” Huang Dong went over as he saw it still struggling, “This thing has a pretty strong vitality as it didn’t die even after it was sliced in half.”

As he spoke, he subconsciously raised his foot to stomp it.

Luo Yuan did not care much but soon found that Huang Dong was all red. He was stomping on the ant forcefully but was not able to squash it as the ant’s crust was incredibly tough.

Luo Yuan was thinking of something as he raised his voice, “Lift your leg.”

Huo Dong quickly complied and raised his leg. The ant's stinger was stuck on the sole of his shoe and almost pierced through it. If it had not been for his shoe's insoles, the ant would have probably gotten his foot.

Huo Dong flung his foot around yet the other half of the ant's body seems to be stuck on his shoes. He quickly asked Luo Yuan for help, "Boss...Boss Luo, can you please help me get it off?!"

"Don't move." Luo Yuan said quietly.

Huo Dong halted his frantic actions and before he was ready, the sole of his shoes together with the other half of the ant was sliced off.

Luo Yuan turned the sliced sole over with the tip of his machete. "The creature's stinger probably contained a strong venom. If you don't want your foot to rot away, it's best to throw your shoes away. Also, don't touch these creatures with any part of your body next time," Luo Yuan warned him.

Huo Dong was freaked out to the point where his face had turned white as he quickly removed his shoes and threw them far away.

Chapter 95: Accident

“Friends outside, where are you all going? Can you bring us along?” A movement nearby caught everyone’s attention as the window to the building beside them opened and the figure of a person appeared.

Everyone looked at Luo Yuan which gave him a headache. “How many of you are there?” he asked.

It was fine if there were only a few people. Luo Yuan would only reject them if there were too many of them. His place was small with limited inventory.

“Two! Just two of us. It’s too dangerous here, I want to leave with you all. We can watch out for each other if there are more of us,” the man quickly said.

“Then come quickly. We’re leaving.” Luo Yuan replied.

“Okay, okay. Right away,” the man was beyond delighted and disappeared promptly from the window.

In a brief moment, they came down.

They were a man and a woman in their thirties carrying a handful of bags. They looked like they were spouses and were covered in layers of clothes. Each of them had a pan hanging in front of their chests. The man who spoke earlier even had an iron

bar in his hand. They seemed like they had been ready by the looks of it.

Wang Shishi could not help but chuckle at their rather funny appearance.

“I’m Zhao Dagang. This is my wife, Jin Meili. How do I address you all?” Zhao Dagang breathed a sigh of relief and asked gratefully.

The team introduced themselves. These two people were very lucky as they had never encountered any danger even since the apocalypse. They had even stayed at home safely during the wave of beasts that attacked five days ago.

“Where are you guys going?” Zhao Dagang asked.

“Jingyue Residential Area, where I used to stay.” Luo Yuan replied.

“Why there? I remember there’s a dugout nearby. We thought you guys would be headed there actually. If that is the case, isn’t it better for us to stay in our own house? Sigh, wasted our effort for nothing,” Zhao Dagang’s wife, Jin Meili, suddenly said. This made the atmosphere awkward.

Sun Xiaowu was furious listening to what she had to say. It was maddening to see her simply disregarding their kindness. He would have charged over to slap her if not for Luo Yuan who

remained still.

Zhao Dagang was feeling awkward as well but did not say anything. It would seem that he thought the same.

Luo Yuan frowned and paused for a moment before he smiled and said, “You’re right too, the dugout is indeed safer.”

“Then let us go to the dugout!” Jin Meili did not seem to sense the lingering awkwardness as she continued saying, “It’s spacious and filled with people. The defense is strong too. Listen to me, you guys are going to die if you go back to Jingyue.”

Wang Shishi could not hold it in any longer and retorted, “It’s none of your business where we are going, busy body.”

“Young lady, how can you not see that I’m only thinking of what is best for all of you. It’s only for your own good,” Jin Meili replied with disbelief.

“Enough.” Zhao Dagang said and pulled her sleeve, not wanting to make things worse.

“I can’t even talk now” she replied. Jin Meili then flung her arm as she glared at him.

Luo Yuan initially thought that they might have looked too docile to them even though they were carrying knives and guns but he had finally realized now that they were just simple-minded.

“Alright, there’s no use bickering. If you guys are going to the dugout, my advice would be not to go there because we just came out from one. That’s that. Now, if you guys are still going to the dugout or returning home, or even following us, it’s up to you. It’s getting late, we still have some distance to cover, we’ll take our leave!” Luo Yuan turned to leave, not wanting to be involved any longer.

Both of them stayed rooted.

“Are we going or not?” Jin Meili asked.

“Where to?” Zhao Dagang grabbed Jin Meili’s hand so they could run if needed as he began to be aware of the surrounding as the team left.

“The dugout of course” Jin Meili said righteously.

“Go? Go your ass! You go if you want to die. Maybe you would be dragged away by mutated beasts halfway there.” Zhao Dagang was still rational. He had been observing the surrounding these few days. There were low level beasts everywhere. He did not think he would be able to make it to the dugout by himself.

“Then why are they alright?” Jin Meili questioned.

“They have knives and guns, of course they’re not scared. I only have this useless iron bar, you really think I’m Superman?” Zhao

Dagang said as he was annoyed. He began to think-even if they were not going to the dugout, it was still safer than them staying at home since there would be more people to lookout for each other.

“Why didn’t you say this earlier!?” Jin Meili stomped her feet and pinched her man.

“I...”

Footsteps were heard from behind the team after just a few minutes of walking.

Luo Yuan and his team turned and saw both Zhao Dagang and his wife coming over.

“Hold up, just now... I’m so sorry for just now. My...my wife is bad with words, I apologize. We want to follow you guys!” Zhao Dagang said apologetically.

“Why didn’t you guys go to the dugout?” Sun Xiaowu who is young and rash replied in a sarcastic manner.

Jin Meili was flushed in embarrassment, her mouth was twitching as if ready to say something but nothing came out after Zhao Dagang signaled her with his eyes.

“Then just follow us since you’re already here,” Luo Yuan did not mind. It was only human nature to want to gain more and avoid loss anyway. Besides, the woman meant no harm.

“Great, great, thank you, thank you!” Zhao Dagang thanked him profusely.

They had been taking the long route so it was already near nightfall when they reached Jingyue Residential Area. Other than a light blue beast for Wang Shishi’s training, their journey had been otherwise safe and smooth.

However, just that one adventure was enough to scare everyone—especially Zhao Dagang and Jin Meili who got intimidated by Wang Shishi seeing how she had killed the beast. Who would have known that this docile young lady was an evolved person.

Jingyue Residential Area looked more forlorn than when Luo Yuan had left. Most of the houses had already collapsed yet surprisingly, the mansion he had been staying at looked the same from the outside.

“We’re finally home!” Wang Shishi cheered happily and ran into the mansion.

Huang Jiahui, who had been almost expressionless was now relaxed too. A joyful smile could be seen on her face.

The team entered the mansion and observed the new surroundings they were in. It was not exactly homely as the inside seemed to have been destroyed by beasts (it was, in fact), the pillar in the middle had already collapsed and the steel fixture in the cement was exposed. Cracks “decorated” the walls and the whole

property looked like it was not far from collapsing.

Luo Yuan checked around and frowned when he saw a lot of unfamiliar footprints on the floor. They seem fresh... probably one or two days old judging from how distinct they looked.

"Did someone come in?" he thought to himself.

Huang Jiahui noticed it too and exchanged a look with Luo Yuan. He then hurried to the bathroom leading to the basement.

Opening the concealed door to the basement, Luo Yuan walked in and Huang Jiahui followed with a torch.

"Damn it!" Luo Yuan cursed. Most of the racks were empty, and the floor was in a mess as rice was scattered all around. Only two bags of the most crucial food remained-one and a half boxes of mineral water, two boxes of Sprite and Coke, three to four boxes of canned food, a box of compressed biscuits and three boxes of wine. About a third of their daily necessities were missing.

Huang Jiahui covered her mouth as she dropped to the floor saying, "How is this possible?"

Luo Yuan did not care much about food, they could still replace it with mutated meat after all, but there was only one and a half boxes of mineral water left. He remembered clearly that drinking water and other beverages lined half the wall in here before they left but only these few were left now.

The whole city was contaminated by radiation now and so was the water source outside. While the actual severity is unknown, Luo Yuan suspected that normal people would not be able to drink it. He dared not try even with a 13-point Physique.

“Don’t let me know who it is!” Luo Yuan grinded his teeth while replying.

“I think it’s Huang Yuying.” Huang Jiahui sighed and continued, “She knows this basement, she’s the biggest suspect. If she didn’t die from the wave of beasts, she would definitely return here.”

It would have to be Huang Yuying if they had to point fingers. She had even brought people over to move most of the things away.

“It should be her!” Luo Yuan agreed after some thought.

“Seems like she’s not totally cruel though, at least she left something for us.” Huang Jiahui replied with a forced smile. She was upset as someone she had saved had turned around to stab her in the back. Of course she would feel hurt.

“I don’t think so. They probably could not manage to move everything at once. She’ll return after some time,” Luo Yuan said coldly.

“Are you going to kill her?” Huang Jiahui quickly asked.

Luo Yuan did not know what to do with her either. Logically, Huang Yuying did nothing wrong. After all, she would have thought that they had gone to the underground base and would never return. It was understandable that she would take these items as they would have belonged to no one.

Luo Yuan was silent as he thought of this and said, "I'll give her a chance."

"Huang Yuying...she's not that bad really. She couldn't have known that we'd return. Let's go back up, I still have to prepare dinner," Huang Jiahui said as she stood up and squeezed Luo Yuan's hand before picking up some canned food and walked towards the stairs.

Luo Yuan knew what she meant and nodded, following her up.

People were already cleaning the place outside, some swept while others mopped the floor.

"Sister Huang, where's the rice? I'll cook!" Cao Ling put down the mop and told Huang Jiahui.

"I...I can help too!" Ning Xiaoran said with a flushed face.

Zhao Dagang promptly used his eyes to signal his wife who also walked over albeit a little more reluctantly.

Huang Jiahui was stunned at first but then smiled and said, “Then let’s go together. What can you guys make?”

“I can cut vegetables, make soup, and be an assistant.”

“I can make the usual home-cooked dishes as long as there are ingredients.”

The few women chatted as they moved to the kitchen.

“Boss, this place is too damaged. Why don't we move somewhere else? I saw a few mansions around here that are still well kept,” Huo Dong passed a cigarette over and wanted to light it for Luo Yuan.

There was a large hole in the wall on the first floor and it was only a matter of time before this hazardous house collapsed.

Luo Yuan was not used to being treated this way. He waved his hand as if to reject the help offered to him. He lighted his cigarette with his own lighter and said after a puff, “Indeed we should. But it’s late today. We’ll talk about it tomorrow.”

Empty houses were everywhere now. One with a basement would not be difficult to find either. A lot of rich people loved having basements and wine cellars in their homes, especially during the period right before the apocalypse.

Everyone worked hard to clean the place. Other than the areas

that were already wrecked, the place looked brand new.

After they cleaned a huge marble table covered in cracks from being smashed by cement from the ceiling, dinner was served. The women's hard labor produced a pot of mixed stew which was basically canned meat and vegetables that were thrown in and cooked together.

The taste was delightful though. The pot of stew was completely clean by the end.

After dinner, Huang Jiahui gave up on cleaning as the few women once again fought to clean the utensils.

Luo Yuan arranged for everyone to sleep in the basement after some thought as it was dangerous outside. However, he had still separated the three of them from the others to prevent the two girls from feeling awkward. He set up a tent and three of them slept together.

They were used to sleeping together now after so many days, even Huang Jiahui felt that it was normal. Though it could also have been her subconsciously trying to ignore her issues with Wang Shishi.

Wang Shishi had clung herself onto Luo Yuan just as he entered the tent, pushing her lips near his ears and said, "Why are all the things gone? Even the racks are empty. It must be Huang Yuying who took them, right?"

Luo Yuan was a little shocked, not because she guessed that it was Huang Yuying but rather because she had whispered it to him instead of shouting it out loud just now.

“I’m correct, right?” Wang Shishi spoke excitedly in the dark, with her leg wound on Luo Yuan. “I already felt that she wasn’t a nice person from the beginning. She looks like a vixen who only knows how to seduce men. She isn’t some saint.”

“Must looking like a vixen be related to being a bad person?” Luo Yuan thought, not understanding her logic.

“Huang Yuying had a tough life.” Huang Jiahui added and sighed from the other side.

“Those who are pitiful must also have their detestable sides” Wang Shishi retorted and blew a gust of hot air against Luo Yuan’s neck with a slight tremble.

Luo Yuan knew something was odd. Wang Shishi’s body was warm and she kept puffing warm breaths of air; her chest slid against his arm lightly and her body writhed from time to time. If he did not pay attention, he would not have noticed.

Even in the dark, Luo Yuan could feel that her skin was red like a cooked shrimp. Her sighs got more erratic and what was more unbelievable was that the two women were still bickering softly throughout the night.

Trembles in one of their voices were getting more obvious, however.

Luo Yuan's eyes were wide open even in the dark though his body was not moving at all. After a while, Wang Shishi's body gave a strong shudder. Only then did he brace himself to say, "Alright, it's very late already. Don't talk anymore. Sleep!"

As he spoke, he pulled his arm away from the warm softness and turned towards Huang Jiahui to sleep.

The night was quiet just like the surrounding.

Chapter 96: Strange

In the middle of the night, Luo Yuan suddenly felt palpitations.

His eyes blinked open, but he remained still. He was perplexed. The palpitations came and went simply, as if it was all an illusion.

He listened to the movement on the outside in alert. The dull growls of the beasts could be heard far in the distance, so the palpitations couldn't have been caused by them. Other than the growls, he could not sense anything else.

“Could it really be an illusion?”

He was puzzled as he looked at Huang Jiahui and Wang Shishi, who seemed to be happy in dreamland.

As sleep came to him again, Luo Yuan surrendered to it once more, his grip on the machete handle tightening.

Nothing happened throughout the night.

The next morning, they all woke up one after the other. The weather looked gloomy, like it was about to rain.

After lunch, Luo Yuan decided to check around to see if there were any dangerous beasts in the area. They did intend to stay there for a long time after all.

The plants had grown a lot lusher in just five days time. The park had become a green grassland, the height of the grass reaching Luo Yuan's chest. The smaller trees were wider in girth, forming a canopy with their lush leaves.

Following the bestial wave, nature seemed to be growing wildly without any human interference, wiping the signs of mankind quickly.

Luo Yuan thought this place would turn into a jungle soon without the influence of an external force.

He walked forward in the bushes, gripping his machete warily. Various sounds came from his surroundings, an obvious indicator of the bountiful mutated creatures there.

Suddenly, a beetle with yellow and black stripes shot toward him like an arrow.

With a flash of the blade, the beetle let out a strange cry and landed on the ground in two halves.

This had been the fifteenth ambush Luo Yuan had encountered.

A soft wind blew, making the bushes sway with a faint sound. Considering the amount of danger lurking in the area, Luo Yuan felt that there was another attack brewing.

“These plants cannot stay if we want to stay here.”

Luo Yuan remembered that there had been a lot of diesel in the basement. Huang Yueying had not touched it when she had moved the supplies, so he could use it to burn these plants.

Suddenly, he felt like he had stepped on something hard. It was a human skull, but instead of the usual white color, this one was black. The person it had belonged to had probably been poisoned to death. The contents of a suitcase were scattered around the skeleton. He could see some torn clothes. One of them looked like it had belonged to a child.

Saddened, Luo Yuan pushed the bushes aside and realized that there was more than one skeleton there. He saw a corpse every few steps he took. Some were the usual ivory color, others were black, some of them were even blue. It was the unusual colors that gave him chills.

Heaven knew how many people had died in the area.

Luo Yuan picked up a sealed mineral water bottle to bring back, but stopped midway there. Tiny worms had infested the water. The worms were miniscule, almost invisible to the naked eye. They were as long as earthworms. Goosebumps rose on his skin as he checked the cap. There was a tiny hole in it.

Luo Yuan threw it far away.

Danger lurked in this place. He could not help but remain on alert.

As long as he was being careful, the beasts would not even come near him.

Half an hour later, Luo Yuan was out of the bushes and had reached the residential area.

More than half of the residential area had been destroyed. Less than 30% of the buildings remained. Large footprints were indented on the cement floor and dirty blood from nearby skeletons stained it. Parts of those skeletons had been crushed under the footprints.

The only thing missing was decomposing bodies. Any bodies must have already been eaten by the mutated insects and other low level creatures within half an hour's time.

The remaining buildings were scattered amidst the ruins. Other than a few better-preserved mansions, most of the high-rise buildings were covered in cracks. The least damaged building was in fact near the park.

A gigantic locust tree stood beside it. Its trunk was so big, it would take three men to link their arms around it. Its several-dozen-meter tall branches formed the largest canopy shading the mansion. Even from afar, Luo Yuan could already smell the soothing fragrance of the tree. It made him feel inexplicably jolly. All he wanted was to keep smelling it.

A smile etched itself onto his face.

“Here it is. Once the grass around has been cleared, we can move in.”

As Luo Yuan reached the mansion, the fragrance got stronger. What was different about it though, was that the strong scent did not feel overpowering. Instead, it calmed and soothed the tension within his body.

The main door to the mansion was wide open.

A few palm-sized mutated cockroaches scattered to the corners in fright when Luo Yuan stepped in.

He saw a wedding photo covered in dust in the living room. A middle-aged groom with a beer belly and a young pretty bride were smiling while they embraced each other.

Other than the dust, everything inside the house seemed to be intact. The owners must have left in a hurry. Luo Yuan saw a few moldy dishes still placed on the table. There were also two half-eaten bowls of rice. Obviously they had been eating right before they had to leave.

Luo Yuan felt a vague premonition, as if he was missing something. The thought had come out of the blue. He entertained it for a while before he finally gave up on it.

This mansion was even larger than the one they had been staying at. There was a total of three floors and five bedrooms, a gym, a study, a piano room and a basement right under a storeroom. What startled Luo Yuan was that there was a bedroom in the basement with a waterbed in it. The bedside table was full of adult toys and things Luo Yuan had never seen before.

The closet opposite it was open, housing all sorts of uniforms and lingerie.

Other than that, there was nothing else.

Luo Yuan found five bags of rice and some limited supplies in the kitchen cabinet. It was still better than nothing. They could scavenge the nearby houses for more supplies.

When Luo Yuan left the mansion, it was drizzling outside. The rain did not seem like it was going to stop anytime soon, foiling Luo Yuan's plan to burn the field in the afternoon.

Luo Yuan threw down a white level mutated beast. The group gathered around in curiosity.

It was a mutated mouse, but it looked different than the ones they'd seen in Donghu City. Its body had mutated again, but this time in another direction. It was slender and its tail was much shorter, black shiny scales covering it. The skull seemed to have grown wider and its nose looked more stereoscopic. Its teeth were crisscrossing, looking rather frightening.

It was untimely that the beast had rushed over and bumped into Luo Yuan while he was heading back. He had sliced off half its head. It would be an extra dish for lunch.

“Don’t catch a cold,” Huang Jiahui grumbled as she passed a towel over.

Luo Yuan smiled. His physique had been intrinsically different ever since the system had added a point to it. Perhaps even his genes had changed. The light rain could do no harm to him, but he didn’t bother to explain.

Luo Yuan dried his hair with the towel. He did not need to change his clothes. The surface of the black-owl-feather synthesized clothes was coated with a layer of oil and water, and it was dustproof like a bird’s feathers. All it took was a few shakes and he was dry again, even after being dipped in water.

“How are things outside?” Huang Jiahui asked, looking at Luo Yuan.

Everyone perked up their ears.

After thinking carefully, Luo Yuan said, “Other than some poisonous low-level beasts, there’s not much danger. But it’s better not to go out before the field in the park has been cleared.”

That was true for him. If it were them going out, no one would

probably be able to survive other than Wang Shishi.

Luo Yuan kept the truth from them though. It would only bring their spirits down.

After lunch, Luo Yuan went to the empty space in front of the mansion to practice with his machete. There was nothing else he could do considering it was still raining. He had slightly calmed down after going around the place, his mood gradually relaxing as his knife skill got smoother. He could easily concentrate his willpower now, even a little faster than usual.

His eyes turned dark and deep as a visible glow surrounded the blade of the machete.

After the AP addition, Luo Yuan's knife skill had already begun to become legendary.

The glow of the blade was different than the one described in novels, but its power was not any weaker. The only difference was that the glow in novels depleted Qi while his glow consumed willpower.

He was exuding an aura even stronger than the one he had showed intentionally in the dugout. Anyone watching him would suddenly find themselves feeling suffocated, their faces draining of any color as their breathing got heavier. Once they regained their senses, they would retreat quickly. When they dared take a look at Luo Yuan again, their expression would turn to terror.

Luo Yuan kept his mind empty of any thoughts, feeling his willpower grow through his machete as he practiced.

Before the raindrops could even land on the blade, they were diced back into atoms. Luo Yuan's willpower depleted little by little each time the raindrops were diced, but the intensity of the depletion was nothing compared to when his machete landed on beasts or metals.

Soon his hair had gotten wet again.

Luo Yuan frowned as he stopped.

“Still can't do it!” He shook his head. The blade glow that had permeated the machete from blade to handle when he had killed the mutated earthworm could not be reproduced again, no matter how much he practiced or battled. It was as if a thin line separated him and that realm. He was so near, yet so far.

“I was really angry. My mind was blank. I don't even know what I was doing.” He closed his eyes as he recalled the situation back then.

“No, my mind can't have been blank... That would mean no thoughts, a relaxation of willpower. How can willpower be concentrated in such a relaxed state? It can't possibly have affected reality.”

If he were to parallelize willpower with a country, an average

person's willpower would be like a country with no purpose or organization; a slightly concentrated willpower would be like a democratic country, a sole government with a purpose, but lots of different voices; an even more focused willpower would be like a sovereign state, a powerful government with a sole vision, all its people uniting to realize it. A country like that would make even stronger countries afraid as its strength would be in its unity, and it could be released ten to a hundred fold during a war.

Taoist practice placed importance on untainted, virgin-like hearts and pure behavior. People with simple minds thought less and would always succeed no matter what they did, because they were focused on what they were doing. Successful people were always a little bit obsessed.

“It was anger, a burning fury that blinded everything else and focused my willpower like never before,” Luo Yuan reached an epiphany as he recalled the situation carefully.

However, knowing and doing were two entirely different things. Just because someone wanted to become enraged, it did not mean that they could achieve it.

Luo Yuan let his feelings simmer, but they still lacked compared to the fury he had felt the other day. The blade glowed slightly brighter, but it was still far from what he wanted.

He knew he was being impatient. He already knew what the right method was, so he could achieve it if he practiced enough.

Luo Yuan suddenly felt like he was being watched. He felt goosebumps on his skin, and he turned around just in time to catch a faint shadow flash away.

In an instant, he was already heading the way the shadow had disappeared.

Chapter 97: Enchanted

Luo Yuan returned a few minutes later, visibly disturbed. He had searched through the whole residential area, but he had not found anything.

“Did you all see a person standing there just now?” he asked everyone.

“No, my eyes were only on you, Boss,” Sun Xiaowu said, looking embarrassed.

The others shook their heads too.

“Boss, could you maybe have been mistaken?” Huo Dong asked carefully, beginning to get nervous.

Was he really mistaken? Luo Yuan was not sure. The shadow had disappeared within the blink of an eye. His 13-point Dexterity was faster than normal people’s by 3.3 times. Unless that person had supersonic speed, his eyes would have caught them. Yet they hadn’t.

Luo Yuan thought back to the palpitations last night, his expression becoming serious. If it had been illusion, it was strange to have it happen twice in such a short period of time.

“Maybe I’ve really been mistaken,” Luo Yuan said without letting anything show. Telling them about this would not be of much

help. It would only add to their fear.

He cut short his practice at the mansion, and asked Huang Jiahui to be on alert and open fire as a warning if anything seemed to be wrong. He went out again twice, but made no new discoveries.

He carefully searched the whole Jingyue Residential Area one last time, going through every room in the crumbling buildings. What spooked him was that there were no survivors in the whole area. There weren't even dead bodies.

Most of the houses' interior was still neat and tidy, showing no sign that the owners had left in a rush. Important resources, like food, had all been left behind.

This was not normal at all. The whole residential area was exuding a strange aura.

When he returned to the mansion, Cao Ling approached him hastily, avoiding everybody else, and whispered, "Did you see Ning Xiaoran?"

Luo Yuan was shocked. "What happened?"

"I don't know what's going on. She was here just now. I asked her to throw the garbage away, but she hasn't returned yet. It's been almost half an hour. You just came back from outside. Did you see her?"

“Did you go through the rooms?” Luo Yuan asked calmly.

“I’ve already searched everywhere. I even looked in the basement, but I can’t find her. It’s so dangerous outside. She couldn’t have gone out, could she?” Cao Ling said anxiously, pure terror showing on her face.

“Did you mention this to anyone else?” Luo Yuan asked.

Cao Ling looked hesitant as she said, “Not yet, I can’t have them go out there alone and risk their lives for Ning Xiaoran!”

They were outsiders after all, and could not compare to Luo Yuan’s own women. If the news had spread and Wang Shishi or Huang Jiahui were to go out and look for Ning Xiaoran, the rest of them would be held accountable if anything happened to them.

Luo Yuan nodded appreciatively and praised, “You did well. Don’t tell anyone else, I don’t want them to panic. I’ll go look for her now.” Luo Yuan stood up, holding his machete.

“Ning Xiaoran won’t be harmed, will she?” Cao Ling asked worriedly.

Luo Yuan kept quiet and went outside with quick steps.

It was rainy and gloomy. The sky was already getting dark despite the fact that it wasn’t even 5 p.m.

“Ning Xiaoran!”

“Where are you, Ning Xiaoran?”

Luo Yuan shouted as he walked, his footsteps promptly concealed by watery mud. The residential area was still considerably large and there were buildings and plants all over the place, blocking his sight.

He would not be able to find anyone this way, not anytime soon. In fact, he had already given up hope. He knew how dangerous it was outside. It was half an hour since Ning Xiaoran had disappeared. It would be a miracle if he could even find a trace of her body.

He could only leave things to fate now.

Luo Yuan had been searching for nearly ten minutes. He was about to give up, when suddenly he saw a shoe stuck in the mud.

It was a woman's sneaker. It looked like it had just gotten stuck. The mud around it was still fresh. Luo Yuan thought it looked familiar.

“It belongs to Ning Xiaoran!”

He lifted his head in alarm. She must have walked through the

bushes beside it. They looked like they had been walked on.

Luo Yuan had not expected the usually timid and quiet girl to be so bold. Did she not know that bushes hid all sorts of mutated creatures?

The rain got heavier as thunder roared.

Luo Yuan quickly followed the tracks on the bushes. He finally found something when he passed by a crumbled building.

A figure dressed in a beige jacket was slowly walking towards the front under the rain.

Her steps were wobbly. She fell to the ground a few times, but each time she stood back up and kept walking forward.

Luo Yuan picked up his pace and was behind her within a second. His grasp on the machete tightened. He could sense that something was wrong. How could a weak woman, who had already fallen a few times, still be safe when she'd been outside for half an hour? This sounded strange to him.

“Where are you going, Ning Xiaoran?”

Ning Xiaoran continued moving forward as if she had not heard him.

Luo Yuan was startled and his grip tightened even more.

The rain got heavier. The sky was completely dark by now and lightning stroke, offering flitting rays of light.

Luo Yuan followed her for a little longer, but in the end decided not to linger around. He could feel a strong sense of incoming danger. He would regret it if the mansion was attacked and he was not there.

He stepped in front of her and saw that she looked completely dazed. She did not even seem to realize that he was standing in front of her.

This was not an expression of a normal person. Luo Yuan narrowed his eyes and slowly pulled out his machete.

His urge to kill got stronger as Ning Xiaoran got nearer. A frightening aura came out of him as the air around them felt restless. Low-level beasts nearby ran helter-skelter as if sensing their impending deaths.

Just as Luo Yuan was ready to strike, Ning Xiaoran spasmed and her eyes rolled back into her head.

Life seemed to come back to her pupils as she moaned. Even though they still looked a little dazed, they did not look as hollow as they had earlier.

Luo Yuan controlled his murdering instinct, but he did not relax. His eyes followed her. He was ready to attack if anything went wrong.

“Oh! Brother Luo?” Ning Xiaoran seemed to have woken up from a dream as she looked at Luo Yuan with a shocked expression. Her face was already flushing red before she had even finished her sentence.

Then she noticed their surroundings and said nervously, “I... Why am I outside?”

“You don’t remember walking here alone?” Luo Yuan asked.

“Me, alone?” Ning Xiaoran’s jaw dropped.

“You’ve already been out here for half an hour. If I didn’t come searching for you, you probably would have been eaten by the beasts. Try to remember how you came here,” Luo Yuan asked. He would not be able to drop this matter unless he got to the bottom of it.

Ning Xiaoran was close to tears. She was scared and cold, her body trembling like a frightened pigeon, “I... I don’t know, I don’t know how I ended up here.”

“Calm down first. Think carefully. What were you doing before this?” Luo Yuan guided her.

“I... I think I was throwing away the garbage. I was throwing it out door, but I felt that it was not... not so nice to dump it by the door. It's not too dangerous to go a few steps further. Then... then I can't remember,” Ning Xiaoran stuttered.

Luo Yuan thought this was ridiculous, but noticing Ning Xiaoran's trembling body, he decided that it was not a pressing matter. “It's late,” he said. “Let's go back first. Think about it carefully again later, but don't tell anyone about it yet.”

“I... I understand,” Ning Xiaoran nodded and looked around nervously. She was terrified.

Luo Yuan turned around to leave. Ning Xiaoran followed hurriedly, clutching onto the corner of his clothes after a short hesitation. Her face flushed crimson.

About ten minutes later, the two of them arrived at the mansion.

Dinner was already served, but no one had eaten because Luo Yuan was not home yet. They were sitting on the couch chatting. They all stood up together when they saw him return.

“Why did Ning Xiaoran follow him out? I was just asking where she was,” Huang Jiahui said, looking shocked. She seemed a little upset, her hands tightening around the hem of her clothes. Her mind must have jumped to a different conclusion, seeing the two of them come in huddling like that.

Wang Shishi hummed coldly as she looked away.

“We’ll talk about this later. Jiahui, find something for Ning Xiaoran to change into. Cao Ling, go make some ginger soup in the kitchen. We still have ginger, right?” Luo Yuan asked.

Cao Ling quickly stood up. “Yes, of course!”

Huang Jiahui hurried to get a change of clothes as she took in Ning Xiaoran’s purple lips. The girl was obviously freezing.

Zhao Dagang nudged Jin Meili. She glared at him and stood up unwillingly. “Do you need a towel?”

Zhao Dagang was speechless. This was a no brainer. She should have known what to do.

Jin Meili waited for Luo Yuan to nod before she ran to the bathroom and brought him a towel.

Luo Yuan waved his hand, “Give it to Ning Xiaoran.”

Wang Shishi was at her wit’s end. Jealousy flooded her. She felt like someone had just snatched away her favorite toy. Luo Yuan, though, could not spare any attention for Wang Shishi right now. His mind was on Ning Xiaoran and how her consciousness had been manipulated.

A system notification suddenly rang in his head,

“Level E Mission: Find and Eliminate the Reason Behind the Disappearance of the Population of the Jingyue Residential Area,

Time: 3 days. Reject/Accept.”

Just like he had thought. There was indeed something wrong.

For some reason, Luo Yuan felt relieved. A Level E Mission meant that there had to be a blue level beast around, and he had already killed a few of them.

He knew the mission was going to be difficult, but at least it was not hopeless. There should not be a problem as long as he was careful.

This was probably the reason why there were no other higher level beasts claiming such a large area despite the fact that it was a deserted territory

.

The question was, where was this beast now?

He had turned the whole Jingyue Residential Area upside down earlier, but he had not found anything. The hardest part of the mission was obviously finding enemy. He would fail if the beast remained unseen.

Luo Yuan accepted the mission without a second thought. It was safer there compared to other dark blue level beast territories. If he could not survive there, then how could he keep trying to make it through the apocalypse?

Ning Xiaoran changed and had a bowl of ginger soup, her face finally radiating warmth as she sweated. It seemed like she was not going to catch a cold after all.

The atmosphere was a little charged during dinner. Everyone knew it was not normal for Ning Xiaoran to go out, but they were smart enough not to question her about it.

After dinner, Luo Yuan lit a cigarette and said meaningfully, "Everyone be more careful tonight."

Luo Yuan had not said it out loud, but the underlying meaning was clear and it terrified everyone.

Cao Ling was putting up a tough front, but her pale face reflected the fear she was feeling. She looked at Ning Xiaoran, thinking of her disappearance that had yet to be answered.

The only one who had remained calm was Huang Jiahui.

Luo Yuan sighed as he took in everyone's reactions. He could not blame them. They were normal people after all. Courage only came with capability. If Luo Yuan did not have the system, he would most likely feel like them too. Huang Jiahui used to be in the police force at least, and had gotten used to all sorts of things happening after being with Luo Yuan for so long. They had managed to survive a few times now despite coming face to face with death.

Chapter 98: The Haunted Tree

The night was silent.

In the basement, Luo Yuan was lying in a sleeping bag with his eyes tightly closed.

Huang Jiahui was tossing and turning. She could not fall asleep, so she decided to just give up. She sat up in her sleeping bag and whispered, “Please say something. What’s happening?”

Luo Yuan suddenly opened his eyes, “Shhh, keep quiet. Something is moving.”

Huang Jiahui was about to ask what it was when she heard something moving around in the basement too. She held her breath while her heart beat fast. The basement was very dark and she was still in her sleeping bag, so she was not able to see what was happening.

When Luo Yuan opened up his sleeping bag, she saw a shadow stand up somewhere in the back, near where they were sleeping. Its movement was quite stiff and its steps were unsteady. It was such a strange, dark scene. It gave Huang Jiahui goosebumps.

She covered her mouth tight, but her eyes reflected her fear.

She nervously took out her handgun, but she was stopped by Luo Yuan, “Don’t shoot, it’s Ning Xiaoran.”

Huang Jiahui was relieved, but what Luo Yuan said afterwards made her almost scream in fear.

“She seems to be controlled by something. Don’t disturb her. Let’s see where she’s going,” Luo Yuan said calmly. He could not find the mutated animals, so he wanted to lure them out. If he followed Ning Xiaoran, then he believed he would eventually catch the culprit.

Ning Xiaoran seemed to be able to see in the dark. Although she was moving slowly, she was accurately avoiding all obstacles. Step by step, she walked towards the staircase of the basement, her heavy steps very clear in the dark.

“There’s another one.” Just as Ning Xiaoran was about to walk out of the basement, another shadow stood up staggeringly. It was Huo Dong.

The whole basement was rather gloomy and cold. It was horrifying. As Ning Xiaoran opened the basement trapdoor, more shadows, one by one, stood up staggeringly and walked out of the basement.

Wang Shishi, who was already asleep, was no exception. She stood up with empty eyes. She looked like she was sleepwalking and that frightened Huang Jiahui, who kept holding onto Luo Yuan.

A mystery can be the most terrifying thing. Most people are not

afraid of bullets, but they're terrified of ghosts. That's a fact.

Luo Yuan held Wang Shishi's arm and thought of the method he had used to wake Ning Xiaoran up. He used his aura to stimulate her. "Ahh!" She screamed and awakened.

Her eyes looked sleepy. Apparently, she was not aware of what was going on. As she saw both Luo Yuan and Huang Jiahui sitting on the sleeping bag, she asked doubtfully, "Is it dawn already? I just had a nightmare. It was so frightening!"

"No, it's not dawn yet. But please don't sleep anymore, it's too dangerous. If you see anyone else fall asleep, please wake them up and wait for me!" Luo Yuan said solemnly.

Wang Shishi suddenly thought of what Luo Yuan had said during dinner. She was so afraid that her face went pale. She nodded stiffly.

"You be careful, too!" Huang Jiahui said worriedly. She knew she could not do much to help.

"It's nothing, don't worry," Luo Yuan said lightly before he took his Zhanmadao and walked out.

Luo Yuan left the house and followed the shadows walking in front carefully.

He looked at his watch and realized it was already 1.30 a.m. The

dark clouds made the area look gloomier, but the rain had stopped. The ground was still wet and a faint fragrance filled the air.

Though it was very dark, it was not a problem for Luo Yuan. His strong body allowed him to see with a faint light, and his sensory perception helped him move around easily even in a darker area.

They tottered and staggered forward in a straight line. The road was the same one Ning Xiaoran had taken earlier during the day.

Several mutated insects with a fluorescent light were flying around like ghosts of fire, and there was some movement along the tussocks from time to time, but there were no mutated beasts attacking the people up front. It seemed like their bodies had a special, unique mark that prevented mutated beasts from getting too close.

They might have walked for 10 or 30 minutes when they reached the location where Luo Yuan had found Ning Xiaoran. None of them stopped, though.

Suddenly, Luo Yuan saw a light shadow appear out of nowhere in the distance. She was wearing a dress and she had long hair. Her shadow seemed to be slightly transparent and she was moving around in the tussocks like she was weightless. He could see clearly that her feet were not touching the ground. She was flying.

A chill went up his spine and spread to his whole body as his aura was released uncontrollably.

The woman seemed to have felt Luo Yuan as she turned her head around suddenly. Her transparent yet eerie face looked mysteriously beautiful. She smirked, but her smile looked terrifying.

Then she disappeared just as suddenly as she'd appeared a moment ago.

Luo Yuan was shocked. He looked around, but he could no longer see her. She had just vanished.

“What’s happening? What was that?” Luo Yuan looked serious. He had been an atheist all his life and what he had just seen was incomprehensible to him.

“A spirit? An evolved person? Or was she the one who made all the survivors in the region disappear?”

Luo Yuan had never come across such a situation before and he hesitated. However, when he saw that the people in front were unaffected and still walking forward, he decided to follow them.

A mist rose up from the tussocks, and his surroundings suddenly became even more eerie and horrifying.

As he kept going, more spirits appeared. Other than human spirits, there were also some spirits of mutated beasts floating around, but none of them dared go near him. It was like he had something on his body that prevented them from getting too close.

Some of these spirits appeared to be more solid, while others were so dim and weak he thought they could be dispersed by the wind at any time.

The air was filled with a strong fragrance, which smelled quite familiar to him.

He held his knife as he walked forward vigilantly. He felt that he was quite familiar with the surroundings; he looked around and realized that he was near the location of the house he'd wanted to move in.

He felt like he had telepathy as he looked at the locust tree that framed the villa.

The huge locust tree was standing in the dark, unmoving. Its fragrance was stronger than it was during the day. He realized that the tree was huge, about two to three times larger than normal trees. Even at the end of the world, such growing speed was still abnormal.

Luo Yuan realized there were almost no mutated beasts in the area. There wasn't even the chirping sound of insects. It was all suspiciously quiet.

He suddenly recalled something that had happened during his high school years. He used to stay at his grandma's house, located in a village, for a period of time. It was very remote and the transportation was not developed. Though it was already the

twenty-first century, the region was still stuck in the 80's and 90's.

He remembered that the residents there did not plant locust trees and would chop them down if any of them grew. There was a myth that said that the spirit of the people who passed away would be living inside the locust tree and would not be able to reincarnate. That's why they called locust trees ghost trees. He had always laughed at that, thinking it was just a foolish superstition.

Now that he had seen the spirits for himself though, he realized it was true.

As all living creatures mutated, many of them became similar to creatures depicted in myths. He had already seen a mutated beast that looked like a dragon and an enormous orangutan that looked like King Kong.

Thus, it was not beyond his imagination that the spirits would live in the mutated locust tree.

The surrounding mist was getting denser. It looked like a living thing.

He noticed that as they got closer to the locust tree, the number of spirits in the area gradually increased. Luo Yuan realized that he could not put this off any longer. He walked faster until he caught up with the rest and knocked them on the back of their necks. They all slumped to the ground. Suddenly, a high-pitched scream pierced his mind, turning it blank as he stumbled. He recovered quickly.

Suddenly, the spirits seemed to have received some sort of signal as all of them started flowing around like waves of water.

When he recovered, he smirked coldly and exerted his aura. An almost transparent shadow that seemed like the spirit of a mutated beast tried to get near him, but was blown away by a strong wind and dispersed into tiny sparks before disappearing into the air.

Luo Yuan was uncertain at first, but he wasn't anymore when he saw the impact caused by his aura. After all, these things could only tackle normal people, not him. They were not even comparable to low-level mutated beasts.

Under the attack of the aura, even solid spirits did not last long. Their delusive bodies seemed to be blown away by the strong wind, forming intense ripples and becoming dimmer and dimmer, until they burst open like balloons.

Step by step, Luo Yuan walked forward while his aura became stronger. With each step he took, there were about 10 or more spirits bursting open into the air and forming numerous sparks.

A few spirits that were almost humanly solid came closer to Luo Yuan as his aura did not affect them as much. Their horribly distorted faces seemed very eerie in the dark, and the surrounding air was distorted, causing various delusions.

When these spirits got near him, he stabbed them abruptly with his knife.

The spirits were stunned, but their faces reflected a surprising relief before they collapsed and burst into bright sparks.

Luo Yuan's body swayed and he felt dizzy. He realized that it had been only a few strikes, and yet he had used up one-tenth of his Willpower. He had not used much of his Willpower even when he had been hacking a blue level mutated beast.

In fact, all novels, videos and scriptures of Taoism stated that spirits with a great feeling of resentment became avenging spirits and that resentment was actually related to Willpower. As a result, fighting against spirits was a fight of Willpower. That was why so much of his Willpower had been used up.

Although Luo Yuan had a 13-point Willpower, soldiers struggling to survive might have a stronger one. Because he could highly focus his willpower, his knife was like a piece of iron being beaten repeatedly to form a steel knife. As a result, it was a lethal weapon that allowed him to kill those spirits with a higher willpower by just one strike.

Fortunately, there were not many such spirits. Luo Yuan only had to kill about 8 of them before he was done. However, his willpower had been largely consumed.

The battle had lasted just for a few minutes, but the number of spirits had gradually decreased.

Just when Luo Yuan was feeling relieved, the ground suddenly

started shaking like an earthquake was taking place. The rumbling, ear-splitting sound was like a tremendous thunder, and a dilapidated building nearby collapsed.

The quake was so intense that Luo Yuan was not able to stand straight.

“Oh no!” He was shocked as his body moved forward involuntarily.

Meanwhile, the land seemed to have exploded and an enormous amount of mudstones and water drops went splattering in all directions. Suddenly, a twisting thick black root was pulled out of the ground and swept towards Luo Yuan.

Apparently this locust tree was not just able to raise and drive away spirits; it had a very strong attacking ability too, and its ability to conceal its power was much better than the corrosive earthworm's. If Luo Yuan had not reacted fast, he would have lost his life.

After he avoided the attack, he sprinted towards the locust tree, his fast zigzag movement flattening the tussocks nearby.

He moved like an agile cat, running and jumping from time to time. With the help of his sensory perception, he seemed to be able to predict the tree's moves and avoided them before he got hit. Explosive power was radiating from within his body as if he had an endless energy supply. His 13-point Physique allowed him to last longer during a battle.

The ground was covered with bones. The closer he got to the locust tree, the more bones there were. Most people in the district must have been killed by this locust tree.

Luo Yuan was quite cold-blooded; he did not feel any sympathy for the lives of strangers. However, he considered the effects of anger and consciously let himself be hypnotized and become furious.

A bright, sheer light suddenly appeared on the blade of the Zhanmadao and covered its whole length like a flame.

Though he could not control it, maybe it was his subconscious controlling his willpower, because this type of light was different than the previous one. It looked defensive instead of lethal. The grass in the surrounding area was flicked away by an invisible, resilient power.

The surface of the earth kept shaking until the locust tree staggeringly rose up. It looked like a tree-man depicted in a western myth as a vague face formed on the coarse bark of its trunk.

Chapter 99: The Heart Of The Locust Tree

The locust tree was enormous, and so was its root network.

When the roots were pulled up from the ground, they covered an area of more than 100 square meters. Other than the few taproots still in the ground, its network of roots looked like numerous tentacles waving and dancing in the air.

Luo Yuan was infuriated. Without hesitating, he took his knife out and sprinted towards the region of the roots. Suddenly, the roots reacted like a giant snake having its tail stepped on, and violently attacked Luo Yuan.

A fierce wind was howling, sandy soil was splattering all around and several giant rocks were rolling everywhere.

The force was so strong that any normal person not smashed into meat by the roots would have been killed by the pebbles shooting intensively in all directions.

Luo Yuan was hit by a few of them, but they were repelled by a sheer willpower membrane stretching across the surface of his skin.

His willpower membrane looked dimmer than the shiny blade. It was even thinner than soap bubbles. If it wasn't for the darkness of the night, it would not be observable with the naked eye. It seemed very fragile, but it became only slightly dimmer when hit by the high-speed pebbles, and then recovered instantly.

Luo Yuan though was too busy fighting to notice the changes. His eyes looked fierce as he launched himself forward and jumped swiftly within the empty space between the roots, swishing his Zhanmadao.

The roots were cut instantly by the sharp blade. One by one, the big heavy roots slumped behind him and twisted.

Step by step, Luo Yuan walked forward, chopping off more roots as he gradually got closer to the tree trunk.

Perhaps the locust tree could sense the danger, because it suddenly seemed to become fiery and restless. It waved its leftover roots hard and attacked him wildly, but its reduced number of roots did not allow the tree to maintain its stability, and it swayed left and right while its huge canopy rustled.

The eyes on the trunk of the locust tree seemed to crack slightly. They seemed like tightly closed eyes suddenly opening as they shone faintly.

Luo Yuan's heart suddenly throbbed, and he could no longer maintain his anger. He could feel the danger, but he could not avoid it, and he ended up turning cataleptic on the spot.

Suddenly, a soundless wave hit his body like an invisible ripple, causing his willpower membrane to shatter. His mind became blank and he lost his senses.

He gradually woke up after a while.

He looked around vigilantly and retreated immediately out of the dangerous region of the locust tree.

Then he turned and looked at the locust tree in surprise.

It was not moving. It seemed that it had used up all its energy during its last attack. Numerous roots were wiggling slowly into the earth, but their speed was visibly weaker.

The tree's green leaves had turned yellowish as they fell from the sky. The locust tree seemed to have become terribly ill in a short period of time.

As he watched it, Luo Yuan felt both relieved and afraid.

It was too dangerous. How could he have been so reckless? Had he lost his senses?

As he thought of the attack, he realized he had not even been careful.

It seemed that anger could help increase his fighting strength, but it shut out both wisdom and cautiousness, which were essential for any man during dire times. As a result, he had found himself in an extremely dangerous situation. Had he not been

lucky, he might have become muddy flesh while his spirit would have become a servant of the locust tree.

As the mutated plant could only move slowly, all he would need was a tank of gasoline to solve the problem once and for all.

As he thought about it, he still felt a lingering fear.

Was that an actual attack? It felt like a direct attack to my spirit. Even the willpower membrane on my skin was not able to block it. It struck directly into my mind. My brain is still in a daze, Luo Yuan thought to himself.

He had seen the spirits and he now believed in their existence.

His nostrils felt itchy, and when he touched them with his hands, he found blood on them. Later, he would also discover that his ears and eyes were bleeding too.

He was shocked. He tried to walk a few steps carefully, and when he saw that he could move normally and that he had not lost his sight or hearing, he felt slightly relieved.

He rested for a while before he looked at the locust tree again. “I should get it over with now.”

The giant locust tree seemed to have felt Luo Yuan’s malicious gaze. It shivered and slowly pulled its roots out again, but it was visibly weak.

Luo Yuan smirked as he walked forward step by step. A few roots nearby moved weakly before finally giving up.

The vague face in the middle of the trunk took an imploring expression while the tree canopy rustled.

Luo Yuan took out his Zhanmadao, sprinted towards the trunk and hacked at it hard.

The dark blue level Zhanmadao was exceptionally sharp and cut through the trunk smoothly as if it was tofu.

The trunk jolted violently and the roots were aroused by its impending death, twitching wildly. Some of them seemed like they wanted to strike back, but they were chopped off immediately. Luo Yuan did not dare drag this out. He wanted to prevent any accidents.

As the Zhanmadao kept hacking, the huge locust tree that looked like a high-rise building finally collapsed, crushing the nearby building and causing a small-scale earthquake.

About ten seconds later, a series of system notifications rang.

“Level E Mission: Look for and exterminate the cause of the missing residents of the Jingyue District, Completed. Completion Time: 7 hours 36 minutes; Mission Rating: Good!”

“Rewarded Basic EXP 1,600!”

“Comment: Ordinary, EXP +800!”

“EXP: 4,300/19,200!”

Luo Yuan looked at the EXP and sighed. He needed more than that to level up. The EXP he'd just gotten wasn't much.

It was getting harder and harder to level up. In order to reach level 8, he needed to complete at least six Level E Missions, even if he got good mission ratings in all of them. If the target was of dark blue level though...

He quickly dismissed that dangerous thought. He could lose his life.

It was already arduous enough to face a blue level mutated beast. He could get severely injured, even more so if he fought against a dark blue level overlord. As he thought of the dark blue level mutated beasts he had met, he felt pins and needles on his skin.

Luo Yuan wanted to go back home and sleep when he saw something glow in the trunk of the collapsed locust tree.

He doubtfully walked over and discovered that the light source

originated from a location deep into the middle part of the trunk. The wood tissue there was harder than on the rest of the trunk. The other parts of the trunk he could have chopped off straight away, but not this one. He was curious as he carefully dug with his knife.

The tissue was very hard, but it was not a problem for the dark blue level Zhanmadao. As Luo Yuan scraped off the wood tissue, he found a green crystal the size of a pigeon egg inside.

The crystal was perfectly round in shape with a mysterious pattern carved in a darker color on the surface, like a beautifully carved green jade.

It was so green, it felt a living thing. It emitted a glimmering green light among its dark surroundings.

When Luo Yuan held it, he felt calm; his spirit felt nourished, like he was soaking in warm water, and his dazed mind felt refreshed.

As he noticed the difference, he immediately realized that this was something special, and he used his identification skill.

“The Heart of a Haunted Locust Tree”

“Rarity: Blue”

“Weight: 100g”

“Material: An active spirit crystal”

“Attached abilities: Willpower +1, Sensory Perception +1”

“Comments: This is a very rare active crystal and its value is very high. Provided you bring it along with you, it can speedily recover your Willpower and Sensory Perception.”

The message was simple, but Luo Yuan had to read it a few times.

He realized that his Sensory Perception had been enhanced as its range had expanded from 20 m² to 30 m² and his ability to sense minor things, such as the movement of grass, more clearly and in greater detail had increased.

He could not feel the changes in his Willpower though, because it had been largely used up just now. However, he was no longer losing control of it.

Luo Yuan felt elated. Though he tried to suppress his joy, he could not hold back his smile.

He had been meditating for a long time, so it did not take him long to become completely calm.

He suddenly remembered that there were several people lying

somewhere outside. This had been an emergency, so he'd had no choice but to make them faint. He had been attacked by the spirits, so he could not have taken care of them. Hopefully, they had been lucky enough to survive.

Luo Yuan walked there briskly and saw the shadows lying on the ground. Maybe it was because of the intense fight, but the low-level mutated beasts in the area had avoided this region, and thus they had all been safe.

Luo Yuan woke them up. When they came back from their daze and realized that they were not in the familiar basement but in the dark wilderness, all of them except Ning Xiaoran, who had already experienced this during the day, became extremely frightened. Some women even screamed.

Luo Yuan was uncomfortable as he said coldly, "Look at what you have done! You're lucky to have survived this far, but you will not be lucky forever. Today, you were lucky because I followed you here. If I hadn't, you guys would have been eaten by mutated beasts by now. Fight your fear. If you can't, then you might as well just commit suicide. Living is more gruesome than dying these days."

Luo Yuan would not be as gentle with them as he was with Wang Shishi. After all, he was not some charity organization and he had no obligation to help them. In fact, he did not expect these people to help him, but he had helped them because of the morality he felt in life-and-death situations.

He didn't want them to hold him back though. For example, that

day they had all been enchanted by the haunted locust tree when they could have just strengthened their willpower slightly and defended themselves easily from the invisible attack.

Even an evolved person like Wang Shishi had been influenced.

However, he realized that Wang Shishi was not an adult. She was not mature yet, so he could forgive her that.

These adults were the same; they were not too weak, but the comfortable life they had led before these hard times had corroded their body and mind. If they continued to perform so poorly, he would have to be cruel and kick them out.

Nobody dared utter a word as they heard Luo Yuan's cold voice.

Chapter 100: Courage

Huo Dong's head was wrapped in a white towel and his neck was covered with a sleeve, like an Arab. He used his slightly shivering hands to tighten his pant legs with rope, jumped up and down, and then checked again.

He had never been this prudent in his life.

He touched his shirt and pants and when he felt the toughness and coarseness under his hands, he felt slightly calmer. These clothes had been strengthened by the superpower of boss Luo Yuan and had become invincible. They couldn't be destroyed even if they were bitten by a first level mutated beast non-stop for half an hour.

He had not tested them yet though, and he wished that he would never get a chance to.

He took out the last pack of [Yellow Crane Tower 1916](#). He wanted to ease his stress by smoking, but he realized that there were only five cigarettes left. He had given a few to Luo Yuan, but he had never given any to anyone else because he thought that no one else would be able to help him. In fact, he despised them all.

Yellow Crane Tower 1916, a famous cigarette brand in China

Before the apocalypse, he used to be the boss of an agency. Though he could not be compared to a millionaire, he still ranked higher than white collar employees.

He hesitated, but in the end he gave everyone one generously. After all, this was not the time to be stingy. The operation would be very dangerous. If anything were to happen to him, he might get help if he had a good relationship with everyone.

Dumbly, Cheng Xianfeng accepted the cigarette and smelled it greedily. He touched his pocket and slowly took out a lighter, lighting up the cigarette and sucking a mouthful of smoke. After a while, he blew the smoke out. He was intoxicated.

Huo Dong glimpsed at Chen Xianfeng, smiling awkwardly as he said, "We're all facing the same danger now, so let's help each other out."

Sun Xiaowu said casually, "Of course! If anyone is in danger, we have to help them. If anyone dares run away, I won't be forgiving them."

"I agree. Even if we don't mind, I don't think our boss will let that pass," Zhao Gang said at once.

As Huo Dong thought of Luo Yuan's cold attitude that night, he shivered in fear and quickly dropped his selfish plan.

Cheng Xianfeng, on the other hand, was squatting on the ground, smoking quietly.

When they were done smoking, they took a spear made from a triangle-shaped iron they'd found on the shelves and a gasoline

sprinkling can, and walked out of the villa in silent agreement.

The grass did not just obstruct the view, but also nourished mutated beasts, which made it very dangerous for the people staying nearby. Luo Yuan and the others wanted to stay there, so they had to take care of this issue first. However, the park area in the district was too large and they could not clean it all, even if they used all the gasoline they had. Plus, if they did not clean and maintain the area on a daily basis, the grass would grow back quickly and cover everything.

Besides, as they did not have enough gasoline or human resources, Luo Yuan decided to clear just the grass surrounding the villa. Instead of doing it himself, he decided to let the newcomers do it.

They would not grow up if they didn't experience any danger. Plus, he did not want to feed them for doing nothing. If they could not even face such a small danger, he would be thoroughly disappointed. Fortunately, they still had some courage left, or at least they were wise enough to agree without hesitation.

Luo Yuan wanted to let the women join the mission too, but he was stopped by Huang Jiahui, so he let them off.

Women were weak in nature. Some did not even dare kill a chicken. If he let them join, they would not be going to have an adventure, but to commit suicide. He didn't have a choice but to give up his original plan.

On the second floor of the old villa, Luo Yuan was watching the group of them through the broken window.

The four of them appeared to be absurdly prudent. Each time the wind blew, they got frightened and their faces turned pale as a sheet. It was interesting to watch them at first, but soon Luo Yuan got bored.

“Soon we’ll be out of water,” Huang Jiahui, who was standing nearby, said abruptly.

“Why is it gone so fast?” Luo Yuan responded with surprise.

“Other than face washing, teeth brushing and food washing, for which we use the water left over from the water heater, we use mineral water for all the cooking. Plus, each of us consumes one bottle of mineral water a day. No matter how much we save, we still need about half a box of mineral water. We can only survive like this for a few days,” Huang Jiahui said worriedly.

“How many are there left?”

“About half is left in the box,” Huang Jiahui replied.

Looking outside, Luo Yuan said, “I’ll figure it out. I’ll go out later in the evening. Maybe I can get some mineral water from the deserted houses.”

Huang Jiahui hesitated for a while before she said, “What I

wanted to say is, why we don't leave here? After all, the water in the area has been polluted. Even if we can find some mineral water, we will finish it all soon enough. Plus, Hedong City has been abandoned completely. We will not get any support anymore. With so few inhabitants, the whole city will soon become a jungle. Are we going to spend our whole lives here?"

Luo Yuan was silent for some time. "Where do you think it's safe for us to go then?"

"The Capital City!" Huang Jiahui spitted out the three words.

"That's about 1,000 kilometers away from here!" Luo Yuan maintained his calm as he added, "We don't know what dangers we might face along the way. Besides, do you think we can still use the highway? It will take us a few days to walk there, and we can't be certain that we will be safe throughout the way!"

"But we won't be safe for long here either!"

"At least we're safe for now." Luo Yuan suddenly paused. His argument was sound, but it did not conceal his weakness. He felt like those people who chose to stay in the bomb shelter and ignore the danger in Hedong City in favor of a temporary peace.

The sound of Wang Shishi shouting interrupted their argument.

"It's burning! And there're lots of mutated beasts! How many mutated beasts are actually hiding in the grassland?" Wang Shishi

kept shouting, not noticing the pale faces of the other women.

Jing Meili was clenching both her hands tightly until her knuckles had turned white. As she saw numerous mutated beasts run in all directions, some of them rushing towards Zhao Gang, she trembled with fear. She closed her eyes and murmured to herself.

Luo Yuan had sharp senses, so he could hear her praying to Buddha.

“Sun Xiaowu has been bitten!” Ning Xiaran shouted, her eyes filled with fear.

Luo Yuan looked out the window and saw Sun Xiaowu lying on the ground while an insect the size of a dog bit his pant leg. Sun Xiaowu looked anxious. He was stabbing around madly with his spear, but he missed every time. His pants became wet as he peed himself.

The others hesitated for a while before they rushed to help him with their spears.

They were stabbing blindly, none of them managing to aim right. After all, they had never practiced how to use a spear before. They were also afraid of being stabbed by others, and so they dared not use much force while stabbing. As a result, after quite a long time, they still had not managed to kill the mutated insect. It was Cheng Xianfeng who used the spear like a stick to smash the insect and finally managed to save Sun Xiaowu.

Before they could feel relieved though, a burned mutated rat rushed towards them, jumping high and aiming with his teeth towards Zhao Gang's throat.

Zhao Gang was shocked and instinctively used his hand to block it. The mutated rat ended up biting his arm and pushing down Zhao Gang, whose limbs had already gone numb. Zhao Gang cried and swished his arm around, but the mutated rat was too ferocious to give up.

“Zhao Gang got bitten too!” Ning Xiaoran shouted again.

“Are you doing a live show?” Luo Yuan stared at her. Ning Xiaoran was so afraid that she quickly shut her mouth.

Hearing that Zhao Gang had gotten injured, Jing Meili opened her eyes. When she saw Zhao Gang pinned to the ground by the mutated rat, she was so stupefied she almost fainted. When she recovered, she begged Luo Yuan, “Brother Luo, please, please go save Zhao Gang!”

Luo Yuan sighed and shook his head, “They can only save themselves. If they can't even face such a small danger, it's useless. They might live today, but they won't survive for long.”

“Don't worry, the mutated rats can't bite through Zhao Gang's clothes. He'll be alright.” Huang Jiahui knew that Luo Yuan had synthesized the clothes. In fact, they were not normal clothes anymore, but body armor. It only looked like the man was in

danger.

Jing Meili shook her head desperately, suddenly going down on her knees and kowtowing. Soon the floor was painted with her blood. “Brother Luo, I know that you are a good man. Please help him. We’ll repay you next time. We’ll do anything.”

Luo Yuan was moved. Just as he was about to agree, the situation outside changed.

Sun Xiaowu who had just been saved, was both embarrassed and angry by his actions. As he saw Zhao Gang get bitten, he flung himself forward and choked the mutated rat without hesitation.

Amid the slaughtering atmosphere, Huo Dong also forgot about his fear. He grabbed his spear and rushed over with a shout. His spear stabbed into the mutated rat’s stomach, the others’ spears following suit.

“Stand up, it’s alright. Zhao Gang has been saved,” Huang Jiahui said, walking up to Jing Meili to help her up.

Jing Meili raised her head excitedly. Her forehead was bloody and her face was covered in blood and tears. She looked outside doubtfully and saw that Zhao Gang had already stood up and the mutated rat had been thrown aside, its body full of holes.

She wiped her tears away. She was so excited that she was both crying and laughing at the same time.

As Luo Yuan watched the scene, he felt slightly touched.

After experienced this battle, which to Luo Yuan was a battle for kids, the temperament of these people seemed to change. Maybe it was the protective ability of their clothes or perhaps the fact that they had seen blood, but they became steadier when facing mutated beasts.

Each battle thereafter ended very quickly. Sometimes they did not even need each others' help anymore.

Low-rank mutated beasts were not very strong, provided they were not some kind of weird mutated beast. With enough courage, a normal person without any training could kill them easily.

With their increased efficiency, it only took them half a day to clear the grass an 100 m2 area.

The amount of gasoline they used was also less than they'd expected. They only used about eight 25-liter tanks.

In fact, it was the windy conditions that assisted in spreading the fire to more than a 10-meter range.

At the end of the day, every one of them was injured, but most of them had only suffered minor injuries. Cheng Xianfeng had the most serious injury. Two fingers on his left hand had been bitten off, but although he was in agony, he kept silent. Zhao Gang had

also gotten his arm bitten, but he was lucky enough to only get bruises. It was just his muscles that had been injured. He would only need to rest for a few days.

Their clothes were all synthesized using the bark of the locust tree, and they were coarse, hard, compact, and difficult to fold. They looked like a thin layer of armor when they put them on. As all the clothes were blue rank equipment, they were suitable for clumsy, normal people who had not had any training before. They would help them defend themselves if they got bitten.